

# TOWARD A RELATIONAL THEOLOGY OF THE FA'A-SAMOA

A Professional Project  
presented to  
the Faculty of the  
Claremont School of Theology

In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Doctor of Ministry

by  
Liona Le'i Thompson

May 2007

© 2007

Liona Le'i Thompson

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

This professional project, completed by  
Liona Le'i Thompson  
has been presented to and accepted by the  
Faculty of the Claremont School of Theology  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of  
DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

Faculty Committee:  
Philip Clayton  
Stephen Kim

Dean: Susan L. Nelson

## ABSTRACT

### Toward a Relational Theology of the Fa'a-Samoa

by

Liona Le'i Thompson

The purpose of this project is to recover and apply the Samoan traditions and values through employment of process theology, in order to construct a relational theology of the Fa'a-Samoa (the Samoan way of living).

Samoans a century ago were given the impression that their cultural values and traditions were somewhat primitive and unfit for the Christian faith. They were told that it was a culture of pagans and heathens, and it did not have a place in the community of faith.

Samoan people are proud of their heritage and take pride in their culture, but are somehow confused when they attempt to relate their culture to their faith and other different cultures. The negative impression and attitude from the western culture, as well as their own people, makes their cultural traditions weak and less than perfect in relation to the rest of the world. This adverse attitude is prevalent in some areas of Samoa as well as the Samoan community in the United States, where the influence of western culture is predominant.

Truly, when two or more cultures interact, the balance of the scale tends to swing to the values of the stronger and dominant culture. The inferior culture will adopt the values of the predominant culture. This is the situation with the Samoan Christians in Samoa, as well as those who are living in the United States. This issue has been with the Samoan Christians from the time when the first Christian missionaries landed on the

shores of the Samoan islands.

This situation has not confined its unfortunate impact to Samoan culture alone, but has effected other cultures as well. The author believes that there is no wrong doing in adopting values from another culture. However, there is a real problem and danger when cultural values and heritage are lost. Then persons are unable to contribute to society and to find meaning as part of a community of faith.

Hence, this project attempts to relate some of the Samoan values and traditions that express the concept of relationship in relation to process theology. The hope is that this small project will assist other Samoan writers, as well as those who find the sacredness of cultural relationship to be an expression of their faith and the Divine.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I extend my gratitude and thanksgiving to my faculty committee persons, Chairperson Dr. Philip Clayton, and Dr. Stephen Kim, for their advice, guidance, and encouragement during the preparation and the development of this project. Success of this project has been assured because of their positive encouragement. Special thanks to Ms. Elaine Walker, the thesis secretary, for her detailed work on the form and mechanics of this project. Thanks go to Ms. Connie Kimos for her expertise in proof reading and editing of this project. I am grateful to Mrs. Nellie Atuatasi and Mrs. Sheila Suluafi for preliminary formatting of some of the sections of the project. Also, I am grateful to my daughter Aolele for e-mailing various drafts of this project to professors.

I am grateful to the members of the Ola Fou United Samoan Church of America, Lomita, California, for their support and understanding while I worked on this project. I want to thank my beloved parents, High Talking Chief, Le'i Fred and Aolele V. Sagale Thompson. They first taught me about Christian principles and the right path to successful life.

Finally, I want to dedicate this project to my wife Asenati Filomena Atuatasi-Thompson. It was her support and love, as well as her spiritual, physical and financial assistance that has helped me complete this project. She has been my inspiration throughout the entire process. Also, I thank my children Kaio, Maika, Rosalina, Leo, and Aolele for their support.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter	Page
1. Introduction .....	1
Problem Addressed by the Project.....	1
Importance of the Problem.....	1
Thesis Statement.....	3
Definitions of Major Terms.....	3
Previous Work in the Field.....	6
Scope and Limitations.....	8
Procedures for Integration.....	9
Chapter Outline.....	10
2. Samoa Traditions and Values.....	12
Introduction.....	12
The Samoan Traditional Concepts of Relationship.....	12
Extended Family.....	12
Special Occasions.....	15
Ceremonial Occasions.....	19
Samoan Medicines.....	21
Organizations and Associations.....	21
Individuals in the Samoan Tradition.....	23
Matai/Chief.....	24
Members of Family.....	25
3. Historical Developments of Samoan Culture and Christianity.....	32
Early History of Samoa.....	32
Pre-Christian Belief.....	34
Missionary Era and Activity.....	39
Arrival of Missionaries.....	39
Peaceful Co-existence Despite Tensions.....	42
Present Situation of Christianity.....	44
4. Construction of a Relational Theology of Fa'a-Samoa.....	53
Preliminary Discussion.....	53
Integration with the Culture.....	55
Transformation of the Culture.....	57
Process Theology as a Relational Theology.....	60
Basic Concepts of Process Theology.....	60
The Concept of Self or Individual in Process Theology.....	68

Process Ecclesiology for the Samoan Church.....	68
Samoan Traditions and Values related to Process Theology.....	68
Significance of the Samoan Extended Family and Process Theology.....	70
Ideal of the Ava Ceremony.....	80
Theological Significance of the Samoan Myths-Creation Story.....	86
Practical Guides to How Samoan Relational Motifs Support Various Church Ministries .....	91
Ava and Eucharist.....	91
Theological Implications of Tagaloa and the Process God.....	94
Ideal of the Samoan Extended Family.....	97
5. Summary and Conclusion.....	103
Bibliography.....	113



## Chapter 1

### Introduction

#### Problem Addressed by the Project

The problem addressed by the project is that most of our Samoan traditions are being abandoned and discredited by our Samoan people and community. This is a reality resulting from the strong influence of the western culture and religious practices, some of which began with missionaries when they first landed on islands of Samoa in the late 1800's, and continuing to the twenty-first century. This has effected the theological understanding and religious rituals and practices of the Samoan people.

There has been a tension in this relationship. On the one hand, such cultural characteristics as the patterns of life of the people are of utmost significance, but for a long time their traditional values have been underestimated, and condemned by the church. They were regarded as obstacles to be overcome, rather than using them as vehicles to bridge communication of the Gospel and Christian message.

#### Importance of the Problem

This project begins with the conviction that the Samoan culture is unique, and embodies a sense of sacredness within it. When the Gospel was brought to Samoa by the missionaries, they also brought with them the western forms of culture. The result was that problems arise in the clash of cultures.

Traditional western theologies, along with technological globalization have contributed to the decline and neglect of some of the Samoan beautiful cultural values.

Today in Samoa and all the Samoan communities, the Calvinistic concept that God predestines and controls the fate of human beings is pervasive. I strongly believe that the understanding of God that the Samoan people expressed and believed before the missionaries came, was a relational concept. A concept that god Tagaloa, who is the supreme deity and creator of the Samoan islands has a relationship to people and earth. This is reflected and divulged in their understanding of alluding and attributing everything to god Tagaloa, and how Tagaloa relates to the world and to people.

This is the kind of thinking that prominent and overwhelming within the Samoan community. When someone dies, regardless how the death occurs or the person dies, in the eyes of the Samoan culture it is the will of God. And this kind of thinking is identical to process thought, that God is related to every bit of organic matter. God has a relationship with every aspect of life. For example, in the Samoan tradition, relationship is explained through one's responsibility, work, love, and care. As in process thought, relationship is revealed in the idea of an actual entity. A family can never be a family, if there is no relationship among its individual members as well as its immediate context and setting.

Relationship also contributes a great deal to the understanding of these two entities, the family and the individual, within the Samoan traditions; relationship is the ultimate reality and concern in the families, societies, villages and churches. The concept of relationship is revealed in the Samoan gift exchange, corporate duties, and development of society as seen in some of the Samoan organizations, such as the aualuma (society of women), and aumaga (society of men). Relationship is also considered as a

strong concept within process thought. This is shown in the relationship of self to self, the individual to God and to the whole community. These two understandings the family and individual, reveal that an individual cannot consider him/herself as a full and complete being, if they do not consider the significance of their relationship, and they will not attain their true value in life as human beings or God's creation.

It is vital and important for the church to understand the Samoan traditional values and its culture. It will open opportunities to integrate the Gospel into the hearts of the people. And that will bring new understanding and appreciation of all the aspects of the Samoan cultural life. It is also important to see the Gospel through the eyes of Samoan culture by using the values and traditions as a communication tool to relate the Gospel to the people in their own setting or context. And this is very powerful for a spiritual and theological journey of the people, when they recognize that their culture has been a part of their faith searching.

### Thesis Statement

This project seeks to construct a relational theology of the Faa-Samoa (the Samoan way of living) in order to recover and apply the values of traditional Samoan culture, through engagement with process theology.

### Definitions of Major Terms

#### The Fa'a-Samoa (The Samoan Way of Living)

For the purpose of this project, the Fa'a-Samoa way of living refers to certain values and traditions of the culture, which adapts changes without losing character. The Samoan islands have experienced radical changes in the course of its history; yet they have held and maintained some of their traditions and values of its unique culture. The

Fa'a-Samoa has become the source of identity and inspiration for Samoans. It has affected their daily life, work and faith.

#### Aiga Potopoto (Samoan Extended Family)

The Samoan family is different from the western structure of family. The aiga potopoto in Samoa is made up of different generations of individuals who are related by birth, marriage or adoption. The Samoan extended family size ranges from 40 to 60 or more than hundreds of members. The average Samoan household has about 10 to 15 family members and close siblings.

#### Matai (Traditional Chief/Leader)

This person is the leader of the extended family. The matai makes all the sensitive and major decisions for the family. He is responsible for the protection and guidance of the family. The matai preserves peace and harmony within the village as well as his family. The matai represents his extended family to the village council, where rules and decisions for the welfare and the betterment of the village and community are being discussed and made.

#### Tagaloa

The Samoan supreme god and creator of everything. He made all things. He alone at first existed. Tagaloa created both mankind and other gods. The most important of these deities are his agents and bear his own name. For example, Tagaloa-a-Lagi, he reigned supreme as Tagaloa of the skies, Tagaloa-le-fuli, stable Tagaloa, Tagaloa –savali, the messenger and many more.

#### Culture

Culture in this project is understood as a central point for which people have

meaning for life. According to anthropologist Clifford Geertz, culture is defined as:

(1) the total way of life of people; (2) the social legacy the individual acquires from his group; (3) a way of thinking, feeling, and believing; (4) an abstraction from behavior; (5) a theory on the part of the anthropologist about the way in which a group of people in fact behave; (6) a storehouse of pooled learning; (7) a set of standardized orientation to re-current problems; (8) learned behavior, and much more....<sup>1</sup>

Geertz's definition of culture embraces the uniqueness of the person as a human being in a particular setting of life. He speaks about a set of norms and values of an individual or a group of people. And these values and traditions legislate and administer the daily life of an individual and community or people.

### Process Theology

When we speak of process theology, we speak about the movement of various theologians who talk about God with two distinct natures, or "dipolar." And these two natures are unified in the process of the world. God is involved in, and experiences, every moment in the world. God is part of the world, as well as the world is part of God. God is working to bring harmony into the world. God is a related being. And God's relationship to the world makes God responsive to whatever happens in the world.

The purpose of process theology in this project is used as a guidance in discussion, to discuss the relationship of the Samoan values and traditions that have the concept of relationship. Hopefully, from this discussion a relational theology of the Fa'a-Samoa will be constructed or a process understanding from a Samoan perspective.

### Prehension

It is by feeling its other experience in every moment, and every ongoing process

---

<sup>1</sup> Clifford Geertz, The Interpretation of Cultures (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1987), 4.

and relations. “Whitehead’s technical terms for these relations are prehension and feeling. The present occasion ‘prehends’ or feels the previous occasions. The present occasion is nothing but its process of unifying the particular prehensions with which it begins.”<sup>2</sup> In other words, weprehend and feel every drops of experience in every moment.

### Initial Aim

This is in God’s primordial nature. Initial aim begins with God. It is this nature of God that provides harmony for every becoming occasion. In this nature of God, God provides harmony through persuasion rather than by coercive. God does not decide what is best for the occasion, but the occasion will decide for itself what is best.

### Actual Entitiy and Actual Occasion

These two realities are basically the same with one distinction. Actual entity has the implication of God or the primordial nature of God, whereas actual occasion applies to the finite entities but does not refer to God. These realities are many experiences that make up the world.

### Previous Work in the Field

There are many Christian literatures that have written about the history of Pacific-Samoan context. But few published materials were written on the Gospel and Pacific-Samoan cultural values, traditions or related issues. However, I have found little work on the Samoan traditions and values that have a concept of relationship, either ceremonial or special occasions which are resourceful for this project in particular.

---

<sup>2</sup> John B. Cobb and David Ray Griffin, Process Theology: An Introductory Exposition (Philadelphia: Westminster Press. 1976), 19.

Among the texts I will use for sources: *Samoa Village and Quest for the Real Samoa* by anthropologist Lowell D. Holmes. One of the famous writings *History of Samoa*, by Brother Fred Henry will be another useful source. This text was reprinted in 1992. My experience as a local pastor who has served the church for many years, as a native-born Samoan, will also be a source in this discussion. The text, “*Samoa Village*,” by Holmes presents the various traditions and values of the Samoan culture, and how its history as a people began. Holmes discusses the different concepts of relationship within the Samoan culture. The extended family consists of the parents, all the people who live in the household, all the people related to one matai (titleholder), and a larger alliance or association of more than one family. The extended family is identified by the Samoan word *aiga potopoto*. It means that all members of one family come together, to share their thoughts about an issue, need or concern. According to Holmes, “the extended family provides for all its members, whether they are old, infirm or lazy. All have claim to the benefits: widows, relatives by marriage, even the illegitimate or adopted children of family members.”<sup>3</sup> The history of Samoa, as recorded by Brother Fred Henry covers a wide range of activities, begins with the prehistoric time and how the group of people called Polynesians journeyed through the rough seas for many centuries to settle in the central Pacific, which they now call home.

For the process theology section, I will refer to the work of some of the famous figures the giants of process theology: John Cobb and Marjorie Suchocki as well

---

<sup>3</sup> Lowell D. Holmes, *Quest for the Real Samoa* (South Hadley, MA: Bergin and Garvey Publishers, 1987), 34.

as some other process theologians. Process theology, based on Alfred North Whitehead's "Philosophy of Organism," reveals the concept of relationship. It is based on the understanding that events or sequences are related or interconnected from event to event. In process theology, these realities of events are called "actual occasion," or actual entity. Cobb indicates, "to be actual is to be a process. Anything which is not a process, is not full-fledged actuality."<sup>4</sup> In other words the actual occasion lives on, contributing its reality to the occasion that succeeds it. Cobb further emphasizes, "the past experience is in the present experience objectively, not subjectively as objectified by and hence incarnated in the present."<sup>5</sup>

According to process thought, there are two kinds of prehensions, Physical and conceptual. Suchocki indicates that physical prehension or the physical pole or feeling of the past is proceeding by movement called 'concrecence,' in which past and present experiences come together in each moment.

#### Scope and Limitations

This project focuses on the relationship between the Fa'a-Samoa (Samoan way of life) concept of relation and process theology. This means that the project will not cover the economic, political, and sociological aspects of the Samoan culture, except for various cases in which these aspects influence or impact the cultural characteristics. The main application of this project is a relational theology of Fa'a-Samoa;" therefore the project will not touch upon other ministries of the church in any way; besides the cultural

---

<sup>4</sup> Cobb and Griffin, 14.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 23.



and theological dimensions.

In the application section of this project, practical theological methods are presented to assist the enhancement of the Samoan Church. The application will be limited to the context of how the Samoan way of life manifested in the Samoan Church.

### Procedures for Integration

In this project, process theology will be presented and integrated with the cultural values and traditions of Samoa that reveal the concept of relationship. And from that integration, a proposed relational theology of the Fa'a-Samoa will be created, to fashion and shape the ministry within the Samoan churches and community. To validate such a proposal, I will be critical in my approach in evaluating the Samoan values and traditions. This will include various elements and discussions, such as the way of life within the community before Christianity arrived in Samoa, the missionary activity in Samoa and background; and lastly, the present situation in Samoa. What are some of the benefits as well as disadvantages that emerged from Samoan Christians, community since they were Christianized by the missionaries?

In the discussion, I will cover the Samoan context in Samoa itself as well as the Samoan community in the United States. I will encourage the church to utilize the Samoan values and traditions, as a part of their agendas and programs, within their worships services and fellowships. Out of this integration, it is hoped that a transformation will begin within the life of the church using the cultural traditions as an embodiment of the church.

A final chapter will be written as the creation of a theology. The project will combine library research and various theological disciplines with practical suggestions for facilitating the discussion. This analysis will hopefully develop a relational theology of the Fa'a-Samoa utilizing the Samoan traditions and values.

Additionally, I will share part of my experience as a pastor to the discussion. I was born and raised in the Samoan culture. This experience will be important in discussing the problems and issues that are being addressed.

### Chapter Outline

Chapter 1 is an introduction and preliminary setting to the problem addressed by the project, the importance of the problem, and a thesis. The major terms mentioned in the project are defined, and work previously done in the field is being discussed. The scope and limitation and the procedure for integration are mentioned. The purpose of this chapter is to set the tone for the chapters that follow.

In Chapter 2, I will discuss the Samoan traditions and values. I will discuss those traditions and values of the Samoan culture that have the concept of relationships. Some of these traditions and values pertain to the extended family, special occasions, and ceremonial occasions. Furthermore, since Samoans have a relationship with plants that provide medicines and healing for the, there will be a discussion of some of the plants used by the Samoans for that purpose. Individuals are very important within the Samoan culture, and that will be covered in the discussion.

The purpose of Chapter 3 is to provide an early history of ancient Samoa; the discussion will cover the history of the people, and their location. There will be a

discussion about the missionaries' activities in the islands of Samoa, was it peaceful or were there any tensions with Samoan culture and its people.

Chapter 4 will be an attempt to construct or develop a relational theology of Fa'a-Samoa. It will begin with the discussion of process theology a relational theology. What will include in this discussion are some of the basic concepts of process that divulge the concept of relationship. I will also mention in the discussion is the concept of self or individual within process theology. The latter part of the chapter is an attempt to relate the Samoan traditions and values to process theology hopefully to provide a relational theology of the Fa'a-Samoa or provide a process understanding from a Samoan perspective. Finally, Chapter 5 will be the summary and conclusion, and then Bibliography.

## Chapter 2

### Samoan Traditions and Values

#### Introduction

This project investigates how the Fa'a-Samoa (the Samoan way of living) or the Samoan traditions, relates to process theology as a relational. I believe that there is some truth in any field of study such as theology, philosophy, sociology, and many others, regarding culture and tradition, and how peoples' lives develop data and information as to what is human. Fa'a-Samoa makes contributions and provides helpful information for a better world and a successful global community.

Taking various courses in process theology, I find it relevant that the concept of process theology which is relational, is similar to some of the relational concepts of our Samoan values. Samoan cultural values can be related to process theology as a relational theology that will provide an understanding of a relational God. This concept of God using the Samoan values and traditions will hopefully encourage Samoans to contribute and share their cultural values for the enrichment of life in the communities and churches they are involved in.

#### The Samoan Traditional Concepts of Relationship

##### Extended Family

The extended family in the Samoan tradition has concepts in which one can determine the meaning and the concept of relationship. The extended family consists of the parents, the people who live in the household, all the people related to one titleholder, (*matai*), and a larger alliance or association of families. This group of individuals and

members, are related by marriage, adoption, and by blood linkage. The extended family is identified by the Samoan word **aiga potopoto**. The extended family ranges from 30 to 50 or even hundreds of members. The average Samoan household is comprised or made up of 10 family members and close siblings.

The family members of one family come together to share their thoughts about issues, needs and concerns, as well as their pain and suffering. According to Lowell Holmes, “the extended family provides for all its members, whether they be old, infirm, or lazy. All have claim to the benefit: widows, relatives by marriage, even the illegitimate or adopted children of family members.”<sup>1</sup> In the extended family, each member continues to help each other. Every man and woman in the Samoan family is responsible for a share of farming and agricultural work on family lands and properties. The extended family is considered to be a typical and basic family structure in the Samoan culture. This is the heartbeat of the Fa’a-Samoa.

Samoans believe in a communal and personal relationship. This concept is revealed in the traditional principle of **vafealoaloa’i** (respect for others). In the extended family, you can also see the Samoan concepts of **osiaga** (care and concern for family) and **mataalofa** (kind eyes/kindness). According to Dr. Faafouina Iofi,

the kind-eyed person cares deeply for the welfare and unity of family. His concern is not limited to his close kin or descent group but extends to all his relatives, including those living outside the confines of family property, even as far as New Zealand and the United States. Such a person can never save anything. His saving are used up through caring and sharing with his family. It seems that giving is his life sustenance. He feels uncomfortable and depressed if unable to give. He believes strongly

---

<sup>1</sup> Holmes, 34.

in the Samoan giving, e tupu mea aveva (there is multiplicity through giving).<sup>2</sup>

Samoans believe that giving prospers families. They believe that their blessings come from their giving and sharing. When they give they receive more in return. Samoans do not give for a reward or to receive something back, but it is their belief that the blessing is spontaneous.

Samoan families believe in cooperative relations, combined effort as seen through working in the plantations of taro and banana or in the field. In farming situations, each member of the extended family contributes his or her share of responsibility working on the farm. Iofi further explains that, “a family raises taro, banana plantations or livestock such as pigs, cattle, and chickens to provide the best for their cultural and extended family obligations.”<sup>3</sup> Sometimes when there is an abundance of food, they will share with neighbors or other families within their immediate context.

Samoan families own land which are given for the building of churches, farms, pastor’s parsonages, schools and educational institutions, hospitals, and other community service projects. All of these pieces of land are given through donations as well as contributions. Iofi indicates, “although privately owned lands, they are given for the common good of the community.”<sup>4</sup> Most of their properties, if not all, are communally owned. And there is no need for any one to save for future plans or in time of need. This will be all taken care of by the extended family and its members. Borrowing is common

---

<sup>2</sup> Fa’afouina Iofi, Samoan Cultural Values and Christian Thought; An Attempt to Relate Traditional Values to Christian Understanding, D.Min. project, Claremont School of Theology, 1980, 27.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 29.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 49.

within the Samoan culture, sometimes without the consent of the property owner. It could be, for instance, a tool, a knife, or food. Selfishness is considered unacceptable and rude by Samoan custom, especially among immediate family members. In this social relationship, almost everyone would be related.

### Special Occasions

Samoan tradition contributes in the understanding of relationship is revealed in Samoan special occasions. There are many occasions that disclose the concept of relationship in the Samoan culture, and I would like to focus on three of these occasions: marriage, matai/chief initiation of title, and funeral. I will not describe these occasions in details, but briefly discuss only those aspects pertaining to the concepts of relationship.

Marriage, before Christianity entered Samoa was considered one of the most observable occasions in Samoan history, especially a marriage between a royal son and a daughter of a high chief or vice versa. Marriage was an occasion for exchanging of gifts between the bride's and groom's families. Douglas Oliver indicates, "marriage everywhere required direct more or less balanced exchange of goods between relatives of the principals: of service for services, of objects for service and/or objects for objects."<sup>5</sup> When the time of marriage is near, everyone participates not only the immediate family members but everyone related to the families of the couple. The marriage ceremony also includes the people of the whole village, especially when the son or the daughter of a high chief is getting married. Holmes indicates that in the Samoan marriage rites, "each

---

<sup>5</sup> Douglas L. Oliver, Native Cultures of the Pacific Islands (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1989), 67.

member of the family, and in some cases, in the village, is tied to everyone else through the exchange of gifts.”<sup>6</sup> Family members work together to make preparations for the couple and the couple’s families during the week of marriage. They range from food preparation from the plantations, to cleaning the house, and the immediate location of the marriage event.

This is also evident in the settings of the initiation of a matai/chief title. Before the extended family comes to a decision as to who will have the matai title bestowed upon them will deliberate and collaborate to seek out among the family members, the best qualified person to hold the matai title and to the family. Sometimes deliberation could take months and even years before they can come to a mutual conclusion. What the extended family looks for in a person to be a matai/chief to lead the family is the charisma and compassion of that matai for the family members, not only within the family context, but whether that matai/traditional leader has the leadership skills to lead the family in the village as well as in the district.

In the ceremony conferring the title matai, the same effort and cooperation are still in seen. People of the village, friends, and especially the family members of the matai/chief, provide assistance and make contributions to the family. The high chiefs, men, women and children and friends are all participated in the initiation event. Prior to the ceremony, the matai/chief of the family assembles his or her immediate and extended family together. The purpose for this gathering is for deliberation and collaboration of ideas, thoughts and suggestions for the smooth operation of the ceremony of conferring

---

<sup>6</sup> Holmes, 37.



the *suafa* (title). The matai/chief title initiation event is a big occasion with many people from different villages and districts as well as other islands coming together to celebrate and witness it. Therefore, the matai/chief want to be certain that everything is in harmony and covered by the program. This gathering of the extended family is best described by a Samoan proverb, “ua aofia i le futiafu e tasi”<sup>7</sup> (gathered together in oneness of the spirit or the consensus of the family). A biblical view that I can recall, that best describes such a gathering is found in Psalms 133:1, when King David was prepared to take the throne for his reign as king of Israel. On the day of his inauguration when the whole nation and people of Israel assembled, David then uttered a now famous speech, “Behold, how good and pleasant it is when brothers dwell in unity!”<sup>8</sup> It is as expression of unity and togetherness within the family and the nation with their leader.

On the occasion of a funeral, people of the village and members of the bereaved family contribute and present different kinds of gifts. Some bring food and money, others come with *tapa/siapo* (Samoan prestige clothing), and some with *ie toga* (fine mats). This is one occasion in the Samoan culture that, no matter how far around the world the relatives of the deceased live, they will always come. Relatives travel to Samoa from far places such as the United States, New Zealand, Australia, and other parts of the world. They come to pay their last respects and tribute to their loved one.

When the sad news of a deceased person reaches the whole village, the pastor prepares the village or congregation’s choir for rehearsal of hymns for their singing at the

---

<sup>7</sup> Erich Schultz, comp. and trans., Samoan Proverbial Expressions: Alagaupu Fa’a-Samoa (Auckland: Polynesia Press, 1989), 67.

<sup>8</sup> Psalms 133.1.

house of the deceased. The village women's fellowship provides a contribution to the bereaved family by giving monetary donations as well as their all night singing. The women will sing various hymns and farewell songs throughout the night. Young men may also come and play guitars and other musical instruments and sing to abate and decrease the suffering affecting the family. Holmes indicates that, "soon after the news of the death, friends of the family and relatives from other parts of the village begin to arrive with gifts of trade cloth, tapa, and fine mats."<sup>9</sup>

Before Christianity, death was with the family for one day because there was no embalming equipment to facilitate the longevity of the corpse. Nowadays with the advance of medical technologies, the deceased will be on earth until all relatives from abroad arrive. Sometimes it takes weeks or even a month, if not longer. Funeral services are held for about two to three days. The funeral services are three to four hours long. There are about six to eight ministers at the minimum, to attend and take part in the funeral service. During the funeral services, assigned members of the extended family prepare the food for those who attend the service, and distribute it immediately after the funeral. Some of the food prepared might be shares chicken, pork, fish, and vegetables. These food are for the pastor of the village and relatives and friends of the deceased. This is done as a token of appreciation to the village for their compassion and sympathy throughout the ordeal. One other notable aspect of the funeral is the mood and feeling of suffering through crying by relatives and people of the village. Iofi observes that,

---

<sup>9</sup> Holmes, 85.

“whenever there is death, the house of the deceased becomes a scene of indescribable lamentation and long wailing.”<sup>10</sup>

Another scene that Holmes describes that after the funeral is very interesting within the Samoan funeral customs,

A period of mourning is observed for approximately a year, at the end which the family calls an official end to mourning. During that year, the grave is decorated everyday with flowers. After a number of years, the coral slabs that mark the graves of untitled men and women sink into the ground and become covered with sand, and the graves became undistinguishable.<sup>11</sup>

Some families would redecorate and reconstruct the old graves when new graves were being dug in the area.

These special occasions divulge the concept of interconnectedness of a Samoan to other Samoans, and I author believe it expresses what it means to be Samoan. This deep mentality of togetherness and cooperation of Samoans in their families is agreed upon and mentioned by Dr. Sala,

the cooperative living of Samoans is perhaps their greatest contribution to American society. Their life of sharing is noble to the cause of humanity. They share their joy and pain in the spirit of a well knit and helpful community.<sup>12</sup>

### Ceremonial Occasions

The **Ava** ceremony is a prestigious Samoan custom. This tradition existed long before Christianity came to the islands of Samoa and is still often practiced. This ceremony is no longer confined or limited to the context of the village council and family

---

<sup>10</sup> Iofi, 133.

<sup>11</sup> Holmes, 87.

<sup>12</sup> Ulisese Sala, A Theology of Samoan Christian Immigrants in the United States, D.Min.. project, Claremont School of Theology, 1980, 107.

context as it was originated, but had a paradigm shift which now includes the Christian setting. This ceremony is used to display appreciation by the hosting village to welcome visitors to their village. It is similar to a Samoan ceremony of prayer to their god Tagaloa asking for his protection and for the work that the people perform that day.

**Ava** is a Samoan name or word given to a special plant used for the ava ceremony. Its root will be cremated and mixed together with water, and when all the ingredients are finally mixed together, the liquid then is called ava. When a cup of ava is presented to a matai/chief during the ava ceremony, the matai will first and foremost pour some ava liquid on the ground. This is a symbol of thanking God for the blessing, good health, protection, and for bringing together people to this new day as well as for a safe trip. Ava liquid also shows the blessing given to earth for good soil for the ava plant. The ava ceremony divulges the relationship of the people to God, and the relationship of the people of God to the earth. It gives a sense of belonging to each other. It is people showing respect to their creator and earth.

Before the village council of the hosting village join together with visitors for the ava ceremony, they will begin with the Samoan ceremonial occasion called **Usu**. This is a ceremonial custom that is performed by the matai/chief to welcome visitors or newcomers into the village. It is an official and respectful way of showing hospitality and friendship. In this Samoan ceremonial occasion, formal speeches are exchanged between the hosting village and the visitors. Each matai/chief of the hosting village provides an ava plant to present to the visitors who are attending the usu ceremony. This

is a Samoan way of accepting the visitors, and showing them their relatedness to the earth and to God.

### Samoan Medicines

Samoan people have a relationship with plants as medicines of healing and treatment. Samoans very effectively and helpfully use plants to make medicine. They use certain types of plants for certain types of sickness. The Samoans use the matalafi for inflammations and infected wounds, the plant called the milo for stomachache, worms and relapse sickness, the niu is given to infants to treat childhood ailments. The lau magamaga fern is to treat childhood ailments, stomachache, and urinary tract problems. The Samoan people have used these plants for medicines as a way of survival for many centuries, before missionaries brought their medication and treatment.

### Organizations and Associations

There are many Samoan traditional organizations, but the dominant ones in the village are the aualuma (society of women) and the aumaga (society of men). The aualuma organization is socially comprised of all unmarried women and of widows of the whole village. According to Holmes, “aualuma is composed of the unmarried women of each family, and it also performs ceremonial and labor functions for the village.”<sup>13</sup> The women serve the village in any way the village council wants them to do, for example, dancing for visitors or visiting groups. The aualuma organization is led by the taupou (daughter of the high chief) of the village. It is the aualuma organization that plans and initiates poula (entertainment parties) and performances for visitors. The aualuma’s

---

<sup>13</sup> Holmes, 42.

major responsibility or obligation is to prepare the *aiava* (a Samoan custom that women furnish whatever they can to give the visitors). This custom usually takes place the night before the visiting group say their farewell to the hosting village the next day. It is an act of hospitality on the part of the village side.

The *auluma*, today has transformed its name to be called the committee of women. It provides the greatest contribution to the development of the village. The *auluma* no longer confines its responsibilities and boundaries within the village setting, but plays a very important role in the growth and the expansion of the mission of the Samoan churches. This *auluma* organization has become the financial backbone for almost every Samoan individual church as well as the mother church. Anthropologist Holmes further supports my description:

Today the *auluma* serves a very different purpose. Composed exclusively of unmarried girls and widows, it is but a part of a greater village organization known as the Women's Committee which also includes wives of untitled men and the wives of Chiefs and Talking Chiefs. While still a recognizable entity, the *auluma* works closely with the other women of the committee in public health and infant welfare activities, in raising money for the village church, and in entertainment of *malaga* (visiting party).<sup>14</sup>

The other organization that will be discussed is the *aumaga* (untitled men). The *aumaga's* enrollment or enlistment is on a voluntary basis from all the untitled men from every household in the village. They have a leader similar to the *auluma*, but their leader is the son of the high chief. They play a very important ceremonial and labor role, serving the village as a cooperative labor unit. The *aumaga* is referred to as the strength of the village. One of their most roles, for example, is the *taloloa* (the whole village taro

---

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 33.

plantation). The management of the village taro plantation is the responsibility of the aumaga organization. The majority of hard labor work is planned and fulfilled by the untitled men or the aumaga. Holmes indicates that some of the activities are,

cutting copra for church money-raising projects, repairing village paths, house building, ferrying passengers and cargo in longboats to vessels anchored outside the reef, planting and harvesting of the village taro patch, and group fishing of the reef flat.<sup>15</sup>

These are just a few of the aumaga's daily responsibilities. For the council meeting of the village, the aumaga do all the cooking and serving, and they prepare the ava ceremony. They are the enforcers or police force for the village laws and curfews. The aumaga protects the village from any outside enemies. They fight for the welfare of the village people.

These two organizations, the aualuma and the aumaga, work together for the goodness and the harmony of the whole village. They share their ideas and thoughts for development of the village and its people for future plan and events. These organizations exemplify the idea of cooperation and relationship.

#### Individuals in the Samoan Tradition

In the development of the Samoan family, village, or church, individuals are seen to be important in every aspect of life. In reality, a person cannot be an individual in the Samoan culture, if he or she does not contribute to society or develop a relationship to another. The individuals that make up a Samoan family are, the matai/chief, the wife or woman, children (boys and girl, and the servant.

---

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 31.

### Matai/Chief

The matai/chief is one of the important figures or individuals within the Samoan family. He or she is responsible for calling the family meeting together when concerns or problems occur. The matai/chief's responsibility is no longer restricted within his/her family's context, but has gone beyond into village development, in the government affairs or church functions and developments. He is the leader and chief of the extended family. The matai/chief in his family makes all the sensitive and major decisions. These decisions range from lands and assets, which are important to the growth and harmony of the family. Holmes mentions, "to maintain family prestige, the matai/chief must have resources to give lavish feasts or to manage impressive property exchanges at funerals or marriages and to contribute to the church."<sup>16</sup> The matai/chief is responsible for all the welfare of all members of his/her household living with him or her, and is concerned with keeping the household happy and satisfied. In the Samoan tradition, people believe that the matai is a leader with a special gift and power to lead and guide his family to God. He/she is a chosen for the family. And every man and woman in the family look to him/her for guidance and trust. Today, the matai/chief in the Samoan family, is looked up to by its members and compared as a Samoan Moses who is appointed by God to lead his/her family into the future for prosperity and wisdom of spirituality in leadership. One Samoan famous song that describes the character of the matai/chief and the verses follows:

---

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 39.



Ua tofia e le Atua Samoa ina ia pulea  
e matai/chiefs, aua o lona mamalu ua  
vaelua iai. God ordained Samoa to be  
governed by matai/chiefs. For this his  
holiness is equally shared with them.<sup>17</sup>

The matai is also known as the family priest. Every evening, the matai/chief will conduct a vesper service for the family, thanking God for protection and safeguarding of the family from their daily chores, as the family gathers at the house for the evening meal and worship. And after the meal, the matai will receive reports about the daily assignments for each individual or group of individuals. The matai shares his appreciation and encouragement for a job well done. He speaks as a father to the family, advising, and counseling. The matai/chief, if needed, will discipline members of his family. This evening gathering, according to tradition, is an ancient practice of the sacred family of the Tagaloas as handed down in Samoan mythology.<sup>18</sup>

### Members of the Family

The matai is not the only important individual within the Samoan tradition. Wife or woman (faletua or tausí), boys and girls, and servant (tautua) also play important roles in the development of a family, village or church. The mother or wife's main responsibility is to give advice to the head of the family, the matai. The mother always promotes and maintains order and harmony within the extended family. She plays a motherly role to the extended family, as well as her immediate family. The mother prepares her daughter for her future role as the wife of the matai/chief, advising her

---

<sup>17</sup> Unknown writer.

<sup>18</sup> Iofi., 34.

daughter of the proper way to carry herself within her family and around her husband, the matai/chief. She promotes necessary improvements in her family as well as in the village.

The children, both boys and girls, already know their duties or responsibilities within the family. The boy helps the matai or his father with work outside the house, such as preparing the food, working on the plantation or the field. The father or the matai sometimes, takes his son for fishing. This is sometimes the test of manhood or a sign of a grown young man, getting preparation for himself to meet greater responsibilities. The girl's responsibilities mainly are inside the house. Her role is to help her mother clean the house, weave the mats and baskets, and many other duties. The boys and girls contribute greatly in helping the growth of the family, physically and spiritually.

The tautua (servant) is considered one the most important individual within the Samoan family, he is the The tautua is the untitled man who is not married, who provides most of the services within the family. The role and responsibility of the tautua is to serve his matai. The tautua is to provide service to the matai. He does what the matai says or order. He is considered the strong arm of the family, in relation to the work and labor force within the family. The service of the tautua is not limit or confine within the family context, but extends to the village setting as well as the church. He is the right hand man of the matai. The tautua is the individual on whom the matai is most dependent on when work and chores of the family need to be fulfilled. The tautua prepares food for the family, serves the matai, and performs the major labors and functions of the family. An outstanding, hardworking tautua is known for the kind of

contributions and dedication as well as his service that he brings to his matai, his family, and his village.

When the time comes to decide or search for a leader or a matai/chief for the extended family, the matai will always look at the service of his tautua for assessment before deliberation process with the family begins. The conditions that the matai and the family will look for in a good tautua are his honesty, his friendliness and compassion to the matai and the family, and whether he was a good example to his peers or other tautua?

There is a Samoan proverb that describes a good tautua: “o le ala I le pule, o le tautua.” (the way to leadership is through service/to be a leader is to be first be a servant).

The duties or responsibilities of all these individuals in the family are shared in a combined effort. They work together for the welfare and a promising future for the immediate and extended family as a whole. In the context of the Fa’a-Samoa there is no such thing as individualism. Individualism is foreign, and non-existence within the Samoan culture. The foundation of the Fa’a-Samoa culture is communal and community oriented. Each person depends on the others for care, wealth, protection, etc. As Sala indicates, “beginning with the family, to the village, to the district, the country and to the whole of Samoa, the person’s life is only a microcosm of the whole. It is by nature a cooperative kind of community.”<sup>19</sup> Each member is a real part of the family, village, church and country. From the moment of birth, an individual’s life has been determined by the social structures and communal way of life. The social organization is highly

---

<sup>19</sup> Sala, 34.

structured, with each individual and group being assigned a role and designated a rank, either in the family, village, church, school, and government. All of these social customs, values, and traditions are based upon attributes of respect, reverence, love, compassion or concern. According to Bousseau,

in the Samoan culture existence is defined by “being.” I exist, therefore I am, is sufficient justification for deserving food, shelter and the necessities of life, including love and belonging. Individuals are not required to earn their rights to exist, it is their birthright. The Samoan culture does not require an individual to accomplish great things to be considered as having lived a very successful life. The western European viewpoint of evaluating the worth of a human’s life by what the person accomplished is strange to the Samoan culture. “She was our grandmother.” That is enough.<sup>20</sup>

The Fa’a-Samoa leads Samoans not to save their resources to use for themselves, but invest them in the maintenance and implementing of their obligations to their family members, friends, and neighbors. Samoans feel uneasy when they cannot help or give to another family in need. They believe that giving is an obligation, not matter who they give to, a relative, friend or even a stranger. Iofi supports this statement and indicates that,

Samoans believe you gain more by giving. Hence, When a Samoan gives it is not a token. It is the best out of the fullness of the joyous heart. Samoans feel ashamed to give something that is below the dignity of the person who is to receive the gift or to be entertained. They will say to whomever they are giving, na o manava o maile e fia maua ni mea se tele...(our guts cry out we have more to give...). It is literally true if a Samoan had million dollars, he would share all with his closest kin, relatives, friends, and even strangers.<sup>21</sup>

It is based upon the interdependence of individual members for the benefit of the entire

---

<sup>20</sup> Susan J. Bosseau and Ben To’omalatai. Fa’a-Samoa: Yesterday and Today, A Resource Guide, [ Downey, CA]: Los Angeles County Office of Education; (Sacramento, CA: Office Criminal Justice Planning 1993), 9.

<sup>21</sup> Iofi, 28

group. It is not individualization, but interconnectedness with other members, either the close family or the extended families. This has become the motivating and guiding belief and a perception that has guided the Samoan culture and its people for many generations. And it still has meaning for the Samoan today. Samoans have lived in the United States for almost a hundred years, and I have never heard or read about any homeless Samoan. Because of the orientation and the nature of their culture, they have survived economic hardships.

The Fa'a-Samoa also reveals the social networking of its cultural assistance as one of the most honorable and distinguished characteristics of the Samoan way of life. This system empowers and inspires Samoans to provide aid to their siblings, friends and neighbors in major social events. This is a collective effort by an extended family or a community as a unified body to come together and freely make contributions and give assistance to individual members. This system of mutual obligation and mutual assistance existed before Christianity reached Samoa in the 1820's. This is a system that keeps Samoan people close together and tighten their community. This helps them to maintain their identity and solidarity as a community. This system has become a survival kit for some of the Samoans, who are now living in their new home, which is the United States. The Samoans have brought their village concept of relationship from Samoa and transformed it into a community of faith in America.

The Fa'a-Samoa is a culture that ignores and abandons individualism. It strongly supports and advocates the concept of community life, rather than individualism. Afoa indicates that, "when a person becomes self-oriented, rather than society oriented,

he/she often fails to consider others. As a result, when he/she becomes self-oriented and he offers less support for the family and community. Self-interest carried to an extreme can begin to disregard the needs of the social life, family or marriage.”<sup>22</sup> This kind of behavior is provocative and annoying to the structure and philosophy in which the Samoan family stands for, which are inter-dependence, inter-relatedness, and inter-connectedness. The strength among the extended families in the Samoan culture lasts forever, because of the strong bond that the family mutually shares together. This family bond includes all the generations of the extended family; young and old, male and female share a special relationship, that is based on mutual sharing of knowledge and wisdom from the elders. Anthropologist Margaret Mead observed that, “relatives in other households also play a role in the children’s lives. Any older relative has a right to demand personal service from younger relatives, a right to criticize their conduct and to interfere in their affairs.”<sup>23</sup> This is all part of the relationship being developed and created within the family realm. No one is left behind in the Samoan culture; every one is important and their existence is valuable.

The Fa’a-Samoa is recognized and identified as a way of life that continues to process and exercise the inter-relatedness of the individual and that of the community. It is the movement of different individuals with different responsibilities to create and develop a one family. There are different parts, but all their functions are to support that one goal. It is not about the individual, but the family. For example, we are cells in a

---

<sup>22</sup> Ioane Asalele Afoa Divorce Counseling with Samoan Couples, D.Min. project, Claremont School of Theology, 1980, 56.

<sup>23</sup> Margaret Mead, From the South Seas (New York: William Morrow and Co., 1939), 41.

great body, and just as, the body is composed of many organs and parts, it is still one body. Samoans take seriously the belief that the individual is an integral part of the community, and the community is the integral part of the individual. The individual is the whole part of the community, and the community is the whole part of the individual. In other words, the individual exists for the family and community, and the community and the family existed for the welfare of the individual. This relationship is inseparable.

Samoan people are proud of their way of life. The missionaries brought many changes: They dissolved some of the Samoan values and traditions that they thought were unchristian. However, the discussion of Samoan values and traditions that are relational gives us the opportunity to examine the social and political aspects of the Samoan culture. It encourages us to become more responsible individuals, working together, and learn how to become responsible leaders for the extended family, village council, government, and churches.

### Chapter 3

#### Historical Developments of Samoan Culture and Christianity

##### Early History of Samoa

The Samoan islands lie in the South Pacific region; geographically they are about 2,400 miles from the Hawaiian islands and 1,760 miles from New Zealand. Their close neighbors include the islands of Fiji, Niue, and Tonga to the south; the Cook islands to the east, and the islands of Tuvalu and Tokelau to the north.

The Samoan islands are volcanic, very fertile, and forested by coconut trees, banana and other tropical trees. Varieties of sea life, which inhabits the reefs, provide good sources of food. Fishermen use canoes carved by craftsmen from deep forest trees from transportation to the reefs and beyond in the open sea. In seasonal fishing, the entire village participates in a corporate or a collective effort using large fishing nets. The raising of livestock is also an important aspect of Samoan village life. They have also lived off the land for resources, such as household goods, tools, land and clothing.

The Samoans have inhabited the islands of Samoa for about 400 years. In the early history of Samoans, they were known for their navigation skills and abilities, and how they explored the open seas in large canoes, and had contact with other Polynesian groups. They became known as the “Vikings of the South Pacific,” and “great navigators.” They occupied the South Pacific region, ranging from the Marquesas, Hawaii and Cook Islands, Tahiti, Tonga and New Zealand as far as Southeast Asia.

Some investigators believe that the Polynesians lived on the Malay Peninsula for centuries. They moved to different islands of Indonesia. These scientists believe that



none of these islands are the original homes of the Polynesians. Some ethnologists believe that Polynesians can trace their races and history all the way to the Persian Gulf; into the Arabic world, as well as the Red Sea. In fact, some of Polynesian words can be traced back to Semitic origin and influences. Many of the cultural values and customs are similar to those of Arabic and Jews. Some of these are, for instance, circumcision of males, taboo rules, time telling, and many more.

In the traditions of the Samoan people, they do not recognize or reckon their history being traced back to that of other Polynesian groups. The old Samoan chiefs and orators truly believed that the Samoans have always been in Samoa. They are the heirs of the land, sons and daughters of their islands. In evidence of that belief, Samoans relate their myths and stories to their Supreme Deity, Tagaloa who is the creator. Samoans believe that their islands as well as their people, were created by this god, Tagaloa. It is Tagaloa that created the Samoa Islands and the first Samoan human being.

In Samoa as well as other Polynesians group of islands, there is a common belief that the departing souls of their people are gathered in a place called “Pulotu.” It is located in the far west side of their islands. According to Brother Henry,

several philologists identify “Pulotu” with Burutu of Burotu of which some ruins in Mesopotamia. Another legend relates that Arawa, one of their large migrating ships, was in danger of being swallowed by the “palata,” an enormous sea-monster. It may be that the original of this Parata was the mouth of the Euphrates, which the Arabs call Pharat. If this assumption be correct, it would again point to Mesopotamia or to the Gulf of Persia as being the cradle of the Polynesians.<sup>1</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Brother Fred Henry. History of Samoa, reprint (Apia, [Western Samoa] : Printed by Commercial Printers, 1992), 5.

If this is the case and the assumption has a valid argument, then it would again point to the Persian Gulf and Mesopotamia currently Iraq, as the “cradle of the Polynesians.”

### Pre-Christian Belief

There is always a divine element in any culture. Religious beliefs have always been the central point or vital aspect for the Samoan community. In the Samoan community, religion legislates every aspect of life. It influences the community, family and individual. The Samoan culture is grounded and rooted in various religious beliefs. And these beliefs help an individual within the community to understand the concept of relationships. The elements that are conventionally shared in the Samoan culture are love and respect. These are obligations and responsibilities of the individual members of the extended family to their chief or higher ranking person within their families, or special occasions and ceremonies.

Religion is basically understood as a set of beliefs and norms. It is associated with ceremonial occasions, and ritual activities to worship a supernatural being or multiple beings. According to missionary John William’s writing as well as other writers they provided an accurate account of the Samoa pagan religion in the early 1830’s. In contrast to the eastern parts of the Polynesian group commonly the Rarotongans referred to the Samoans as “godless,” that the introduction of Christianity was the first-hand experience of Samoans to religious practices. The reason for their claim of Samoans being godless derived from the absence of statues and idols at special places of worship. There were no stains of human blood on worship altars. This seemed strange to John Williams and other missionaries. Malama Meleisea noted, “a close examination of

the writing of the first Christian missionaries shows that the Samoan culture was rich and complex but differed in expression from other parts of Polynesia. The Samoans were not monotheists but they worshiped many gods (polytheists). They also believed that the power of gods and spirits of their ancestors influenced their activities.”<sup>2</sup> In other words, Samoans before Christianity were influenced by the concept of their islands’ belief in more than one god. They believed in multiple gods, with whom their worship is offered by verbal or “mouth worship,” as a mode of communication with their gods.

In the Samoan religion, there were two elements of gods: those of non-human origin-the Atua, and those of human origin-the Aitu. The non-human gods (Atua), were superior and were the original gods, who bore or created other non-human gods, as well as the half-men/half-gods, who are human origin, Aitu. Meleisea stated that, “the Atua did not participate in the everyday life of the people or take the form of humans and other living things, or natural objects. They were not specially involved nor did they have temples or priests. They were believed to reside in pulotu, (the afterworld) or in the lagi (the heavens). Tagaloa was the Supreme Atua who created the universe, earth and mankind. As Tagaloa or Ta’aroa this deity was recognized in many other Polynesian religions.”<sup>3</sup> Although Samoans believed in many gods, all the spirits and gods had a greater or supreme god that ranked the highest and above all the other spirits and gods, who was called Tagaloa.

---

<sup>2</sup> Malama Meleisea, and Penelope Schoeffel Meleisea, Lagaga: A Short History of Western Samoa, (Suva, Fiji: University of the South Pacific, 1987), 35

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 36

This supreme god Tagaloa, deserves the greatest honor and respect of the Samoan people.

Samoa has many versions of creation, of how the first human being was created by the Supreme Tagaloa. Each island has its own story, and these tales are told in the setting that best traces the history of their family and villages, as well as their island and island group. I will focus on one tradition which is from the Manu'a group of islands. This version regards the first creation of human beings as the result of the natural process of evolution, which begins with the intermarriage among different materials and compounds of the earth, rock, clay, sand, earth and thunder. From the mixing and linkup together of these various forms of matter results the "alu'alutoto" (blood clot/embryo). Tagaloa-lagi from his dwelling place on Mount Lagi (Mt. Clouds), saw this blood clot/embryo floating on the beach. He instructed his heavenly family of gods to nurse and nurture this blood clot/embryo. Tagaloa-a-lagi's family covered it with "fuefue" (a vine plant that grow along the beach). As time passed, Tagaloa-a-lagi instructed the "uga" (beach crab) to remove the outer covering of the blood clot. He later then called upon the bird called "tuli" (snipe) to disjoin the blood clot/embryo, so that the various parts of the body would have a chance to move. These parts of the body are the neck, elbows, knees, hands, etc. Some parts of the body are identified with the words, "tuli" such as (snipe), tuli-vae (knees), and tuli-lima (elbows).

The "tuli" completed its task. Tagaloa-a-lagi instructed the "miti" (small black bird) to suck the nostrils of the "alualutoto." And finally, the first man or human being was created. In another creation story, it was Tagaloa-a-lagi who performed all the responsibilities and procedures to create the first human being.

Derek Freeman, a professor of anthropology at the Australian National University, indicated that same group of islands “worshipped the “Great Spirit” called Tagaloa, who resides in the skies/heaven. As well as going to special places in the bush to hold conversations with the great spirit, all the people including the chiefs, prayed and made offerings to Tagaloa. For example, at their great feasts, prior to the distribution of food, an orator arose, and, after enumerating each article, exclaimed. Thank you great Tagaloa, for this!”<sup>24</sup> This practice has influenced the Samoan people for many generations. The Manu’a group of islands was reluctant and almost rejected the Christian God at one time. This was cited by Freeman about missionary Williams’ activities in the Polynesian region.

Freeman, in 1837, in reviewing his experiences in both eastern and western Polynesia, Williams noted that the Samoan, in particular, had a vague idea of a Supreme Being known to them as Tagaloa, whom they looked upon as the “creator of all things and author of their mercies;” and in 1839 Anania, Rarotongan teacher stationed on Ta’u, wrote that some of Manu’ans, in rejecting Jehovah, had claimed that “Tagaloa, of the skies” was the ‘true God’.<sup>4</sup>

The other group of gods in the Samoan religion, called, Aitu, after death reside in a place called “fafa” or “pulu.” It is an after-world or spirit-world dwelling place for Aitu. According to Meleisea,

Their spirits returned among the living to interest themselves (either good or evil) in the doing of their descendents. Aitu were sometimes born as the result of incest between brother and sister or daughter and brother’s son.

---

<sup>4</sup> Derek Freeman, Margaret Mead and Samoa: The Making and Unmaking of an Anthropological Myth (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983), 180.

These Aitu came into the world ‘alu’alu toto/clots of blood or abortion which then were able to take various forms including human beings.<sup>5</sup>

This belief is commonly held throughout the Polynesian religion.

The Samoans believed that the dead spirits resided in the spirit world called “pulotu,” and would return in the midst among the living and concern themselves with the livelihood of their family, either unfortunate or in a positive affairs . Aitu revealed themselves to their families in various forms: human, bird, animal, or other natural material. And their contact or mediator would be a witchdoctor (taulasea).

The witchdoctor would communicate information and news from the aitus to the living family members. This information could be alarming and disturbing as well as pleasant and harmonious, but would always be conveyed and communicated to the living. The family will also communicate their concerns, whatever the case may have been, to their aitu through the witchdoctor. In other words, the gods communicated to the people through a taulasea/taulaitu (witchdoctor), who has that power and gift as the witchdoctor (taulasea/taulaitu) to speak for or to the gods.

Religion and religious beliefs are very important in the social structure of the Samoan people and their culture. They play a significant role in the daily activities and lives of the Samoans, as well as the Polynesians. It truly fashioned the lives of the Samoan people.

---

<sup>5</sup> Meleisea, 181.

## Missionary Era and Activity

### Arrival of Missionaries

The embracing of the Christian message by the Samoan people is an ongoing discovery and research. The London Missionary Society is a product of great religious changes and activities in Europe and America. The Evangelical Revival in Britain, with a parallel advance of rationalism and scientific idea, which emphasized individual conversion, which is by recognizing change of heart through repentance, and trusting the Lord to restore the believer to a new relationship with God. As the result the heart felt a warm feeling and the whole life felt a new direction again, by the grace of God and power of the of the Resurrection with the help of the Holy Spirit, toward love and service of God and fellow-human beings. This redirection echoed part of Jesus' command and including sharing the message of going, "go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit,"<sup>6</sup> The practical re-direction of this Great Commission flowed from various individual churches in the British Isles. People of all classes, men and women, followed the example of William Carey who was Baptist but, influenced by Calvinistic of God. The Calvinists believed that Christ died for the salvation of the predestined; Calvinist missionaries therefore preached the Gospel to all nations for the locating of those who are being elected. Carey brought together different movements in Britain as well as in Germany and Denmark. He inspired the founders of the Mission Society, later known as the London Missionary Society.

---

<sup>6</sup> Matt. 28:19 (NRSV).

Before London Missionary Society (LMS) John Williams spearheaded the missionary work in Samoa in 1830, there had been numerous occasions that evidenced the arrival of Christianity in other parts of Samoa. There was a group of natives from Tahiti who encountered rough seas, were blown off course and managed to reach the Manu'a group of islands in 1827's. In Pago Pago village lived an American sailor by the nickname of "Salema," who encountered the Christian faith in the Pacific islands before reaching Samoa. There were other native Samoans, in the Tongan islands, who were influenced by the Gospel. But the initial date for the first Christian missionary John Williams, and his representatives arrive in Samoa was in 1830. This date has been recognized and accepted as the official date for Christianity's arrival into the Samoan Islands.

John Williams and his party of eight native Tahitians brought with them a Samoan Christian man named Fauea and his wife, from the island of Tonga on their way to Samoa. Meleisea has noted,

Fauea directed Williams to Sapapa'ali'i, a place of residence of Malietoa. When Fauea heard from canoes sailing off the Falealupo, that the chief Tamafiaga had been assassinated at Fasito'outa, he told Williams that the main obstacle to preaching the Gospel in Samoa had been removed.<sup>7</sup>

It was the help of Fauea and his knowledge of the islands that made the initial contact of Christianity in Samoa a harmonious one. John Williams and his group had a warm reception from the Malietoa and his people. This was so, because a prophecy had already been uttered by the goddess "Nafanua" to His Highness Malietoa Fitisemanu. That the "head/crown" of his government will not be from this world, but will come from heaven.

---

<sup>7</sup> Meleisea, 56



And because of that anticipation of waiting for the fulfillment of the prophecy, there was no hostility in accepting the new faith. They were treated with respect and dignity, honors were given to them and they were assisted in their mission work. John Williams came to Samoa with his eight native Tahitians and arrived in Sapapaali'i. These Tahitian missionary teachers assisted Williams in pioneering the establishment of a Samoan mission. The traditions and cultural norms of the Samoans as well as the Polynesians were mostly transmitted in oral and sign languages. Samoans were illiterate. The arrival of the first missionaries in Samoa was also the arrival of the first Samoan written language. The Samoans traveled from different parts of the country to Sapapaali'i to receive the Gospel from the missionary teachers.

John Williams stayed in Samoa for a short period of time and he left behind twelve Tahitian Christians. Williams visited England for the purpose of arguing his case of sending more missionaries to Samoa to supervise the mission field. Williams, on his second trip to Samoa, stopped at the Manu'a group of islands. The people came in their canoes and shared with Williams their new religion, and they called themselves as "Sons of the Word." John Williams left Manu'a for Tutuila where he came in contact with Christian activities in other villages. In 1836, missionary Williams' request was fulfilled; six resident missionaries from the London Missionary Society (L.M.S.) arrived in Samoa. The missionaries were placed in various parts of the mission field in Samoa for the urgent need of the gospel.

The norms and rituals of the new faith or religion which was Christianity, were swiftly absorbed into the Samoan system. The Christian faith now became part of the

supernatural world of the Samoan hierarchy. And before long, the Samoan Christians or converts spearheaded and spread the gospel into the south pacific as well as other parts of the pacific region.

John Williams has made a great contribution and sacrifice for the bringing and growth of Christianity in the Samoan islands. He was regarded as a leader who had brought the Samoan islands out of the bondage of darkness and led them to a new light of relationship with God, the covenantal love of God. It was John Williams and his colleagues' effort that has impacted the Samoan people with the Christian message.

#### Peaceful Co-Existence Despite Tensions

With the missionaries present in Samoa, the chiefs are experiencing a shift of power within their matai structural system. The missionaries are now teachers and have taken over or replaced the power that the matai (chiefs) exercises as native priests in the new religious system. The matai in his or her preceding roles as families' mediators or intercessors with supreme deities are no longer authentic. They simply have become deacons in village churches. John Garrett has indicated that, "As Samoa's old attachment to natural and totemic spirits waned, the LMS prepared Samoan teachers and pastors to take the place of the older holy men and prophets of the village and lend Christian sacral sanction to the traditional social order."<sup>8</sup>

The old Samoan system of religion has now been faced with a tension of new titles by the new religion other than the matai. According to John Garrett,

---

<sup>8</sup> John Garrett, To Live among the Stars: Christians Origins in Oceania (Geneva; Suva, Fiji: World Council of Churches, in association with the Institute of Pacific Studies, University of the South Pacific, 1985), 123.

the LMS introduced a key figure into the picture - the *faifeau*, pastor, surrounded by his council of influential lay deacons. The pastors took the place of the priests and prophets of ancient Samoan religion as mediators with the unseen world. They were given good houses, inferior only to those of the highest chiefs in the village. They were honoured as men of God; in exchange of gifts, food, fine mats, cloth on an impressive scale. Their prayers and presence were considered indispensable on ceremonial occasions. They renounced matai status, but exercised special power of their own because of their spiritual authority and social position. They were charged to proclaim and live the Word of God, to expound the Samoan Bible, to oversee weekly worship on Sundays and ensure that daily family prayers were offered in each household.<sup>9</sup>

The mission in Samoa found rapid success among the people because of the communal oriented power of authority and leadership of the chiefs within their immediate and extended families. The conversion and the acceptance of the Christian faith by Samoan people was not an individual conversion, but a mass conversion of the people. The chiefs of the village council went through great scrutiny of deliberations and collaborations, as well as hard debate to determine the acceptance of the Christian faith by the people. Village meetings and councils would convene for the discussion of these sensitive issues. When issues of this magnitude were present, exceptional shrewdness and remarkable insights from the chiefs were needed. Orators spoke with great wisdom and passion, and sometimes it took long hours or days before a consensus was reached.

Because Samoans are people who respect their family matai (chief) and their authority, the conversion to the Christian faith was a smooth transition. It was a common occurrence when a matai became a Christian or convert, that he/she would exert his/her authority over his household members and convert them to follow the lead. This was a great opportunity for the missionaries to influence the chiefs. There were tensions in

---

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 124.

converting the Samoan people to the Christian faith, because in human nature there is always a sense of curiosity and suspicion when encountering with new challenges. It was out of a sense of respect and trust of extended family members for their matai, that their leaders would prevail with the right decision. Holmes put it nicely when he noticed the wisdom of the chiefs to make decisions on behalf of their people,

Some chiefs claimed that if all villages accepted the new religion wars would be prevented. For some, the ceremonialism of the worship services was appealing. The Samoan love and appreciation of oratory brought a favorable response from mission pastors. Even today the role of substitute pastor is one eagerly sought by village Talking Chiefs anxious to exhibit their versatility and eloquence in the area of ceremonial and formal rhetoric.<sup>10</sup>

Although there was rapid conversion in some parts of Samoa from their pagan religion to Christianity, many pagan practices still survived but in modified form.

The new religion forced the Samoan people to decide at the crossroad of decisions.

#### Present Situation of Christianity

The leadership and authority of the chiefs initiated and facilitated the mass conversion of the Samoan people to the Christian faith that landed on the shores of the Samoan islands. This process has worked for the mission teachers at the beginning of their missionary work in Samoa. It also played a significant role in the progress of the Christian church in Samoa, as well as the migration of Samoan immigrants to the United States, New Zealand, and Australia and other parts of the globe. Samoan people have been Christianized for over 160 years, and the leadership and the influence of the chiefs in spiritual and religious matters are still pertinent and highly respected within the Samoan church. To begin a new Samoan church in California, it is always a matai who

---

<sup>10</sup> Holmes, 60.

advises his household and extended family together to establish a new church. The Samoan household ranges from 60 to 80 individual members, and that can be a good size for a newly established church. Often the chief of the family will decide the pastor of their new church, or his recommendation for a pastor to shepherd the new church will carry the most weight to help determine the final decision. In church meeting and discussion, the chief expects and always depends on his household members to back him up in whatever issues he aligns himself with. This dependency was never an issue of discussion in Samoa, because congregational meetings are normally conducted at the level of the council of the village chiefs and elders.

Also, the Samoan people have the highest regard and respect for authority. Disobedience to their chiefs and leaders is a taboo in their ancient custom. The missionaries found this virtue of the Samoan culture to be an opportunity in the spreading of the gospel, and a substantial support to the missionaries' teaching of the new religion. In the ancient concept of the old Samoan religion, the matai or chiefs are the gods' chosen leaders. Likewise, the new religion taught that Samoan chiefs were leaders chosen by the God to lead families and villages. And humans have no part in choosing these leaders. So the Christian faith sought the opportunity of the divine view of the Samoan authority and leadership. This divine aspect of the Samoan leadership calls for obedience.

These divine qualities of the Samoan chiefs posed no dilemma to the work of the missionaries, but was an opportunity for advancement and rapid spreading of the Gospel. The missionaries observed a paradigm shift of loyalty by the Samoan chiefs from their

old religious concept, to have allegiance to the new religion, the Christian's God. The missionaries were wise with their tactics by beginning their conversion with chiefs. When the chiefs were converted, naturally the family members would have to follow. They had to support their matai. And this is part of leadership and authority within the Samoan family structure.

The new religion made an impact in the life and the old religion of Samoa. It altered the process of life and changed the way people think of themselves, their religious faith and the world. The culture of the Samoan people before Christianity was an oral one, which transferred information from one generation to another word of mouth. This has been true since the beginning of time in any culture or setting. The receiving of the Christian faith by the Samoans is also the accepting of changes. It was a revolutionary moment with a massive conversion at the time. But in the present situation it is unfortunate that the new religion has become static and has little impact among the people. The flavor and the new wind of Christianity has declined for several decades. And part of this problem, according to Ulisese Sala, is

The uniqueness of the Christianity gospel is now clothed in institutional policies. The vitality of the Christian gospel is lost in an old cultural wineskin...this institutional clothing is the central Samoan conception of religion, which affirms the authority of the pastor over congregation, and the matai over his household. It is the affirmation of the power of the matai over his household that has helped to associate the new religion with the old social structure, but even the authority of the pastor is essentially based on the understanding of the old structure whereby fear and awe dominate the relationship.<sup>11</sup>

---

<sup>11</sup> Sala, 18.

The local congregations in the beginning of the missionary activities were under the care of the Samoan teachers that had been selected by the missionaries. These teachers depended solely on the local congregation for material support. And because the villages were governed by the chiefs, the Samoan teachers were very sensitive to the leadership and power of the village fono (council), and could not ignore the opinion and decision of the matai, but treated them with utmost respect. When the matai felt that his authority and power was threatened by the missionary teachers and their proposed policies, the matai would demand a change. In retrospect, the structure and the hierarchy of the church began to gain ground because of the Samoan policy.

Moreover, the political power of the chief was influential and recognized within the church affairs. Oftentimes there was a belief and practice that echoed a self-righteous opinion that the success of the missionary work was the end result of the authority and leadership of the chiefs, whose political power of the matai was highly respected within the church affairs. This practice is very common in the present situation of Christianity, not only in the Samoan village but continues its recognition in many local churches in America, New Zealand and Australia. The recognition of this practice becomes more as a profit monitoring of resources, but not necessarily a revelation of Christian values which demand justice and righteousness in all areas. The Christian practice has failed to encourage the prayer life, study, devotion, and personal responsibility of the individual. The Christian message failed to take root and did not establish the authority of the gospel in the era of missionary work in Samoa.

The chiefs continued their manipulation of the people for the sake of their

political promotion. Some of the heathen practices, such as wars and heathenism were rejected by the missionaries, but have not arrived to the core of the problem. In reality, Christianity had never changed the social order in Samoa. The social order gained more recognition and momentum when it encountered the Christian faith.

In the ancient times, the chiefs are always politically oriented, religious leaders of Samoa. Their power and authority was always religious and never in a spiritual realm. And because of their political prowess, they could easily assimilate their authority with that of the ministers, who were teachers in the local village or congregation. The chiefs jurisdiction of was the whole village and the church of the new religion. Moreover, their authority continued to include the county and district, as well as the whole of Samoa. But the new religion's authority held by the pastor was only a small one; the pastor's area of power was for heavenly things, the invisible realm. The pastor was never accepted in the Samoan culture. It was similar to the separation of state and church. So the social order of the Samoan culture was never challenged by the new religion. But in reality the new religion was simply a transferring of more power to the old religion. The authority and leadership of the chief still enjoyed a higher recognition and function in the village. Sadly, the pastor was only an invisible leader holding an invisible authority. He had no duty in the social operation of the village. The pastor only lived for the spiritual world. He was not a part of the operation of the social order of the village.

And that is a problem for the church today, when problems arise. Policies and regulations of the church sometimes need discussions. This becomes a struggle between the chief and the pastor. It is a power struggle to decide who has the final say on an



unethical or immoral issue. But the teaching and preaching of the word by the pastor directly challenges the authority of the chiefs.

Should the chief be reprimanded and disciplined like everybody else in the congregation? Is the authority of the chief parallel or should be there a line drawn for distinction of authority, the church's authority depicted by the pastor and the village authority represented by the chiefs?

The power struggle between the pastor and the chiefs resulted in the emerging of a dualistic theology in Samoan Christianity. The *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology* defines dualism as, "A theory in interpretation which explains a given situation or domain in terms of two opposing factors or principles."<sup>12</sup> The majority of opinion was that the pastor's duty was only for the spiritual side, while the social and political matters of the village were reserved for the chiefs. Some of the teachings in Christianity and Scripture reflect the teaching of dualism, which helped promote this problem. And the only image of the pastor that the village accepted was that of a spiritual leader, who was absolutely unfitted to be a community leader.

The previous pages of this section have dealt with the situation of Christianity in Samoa from decades ago. As the Samoans have migrated all over the world, many critical issues about their faith and culture have been raised. The new environment of individualism, as well as the technological age, has given the Samoan people a damaging challenge to the type of Christianity that has influenced Samoans in Samoa. The

---

<sup>12</sup> Harold B. Kuhn, in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Walter A. Elwell, (Grand Rapids: Baker House, 1987), 334.

theological issues have become more confused and depressing, if not disturbing to the faith of the Samoans in a different environment. The harmonious acceptance of Christianity by their forefathers in Samoa with a mass conversion to the Christian faith, has now become a mass defection with more complex theological issues in their new homeland. Theological concerns and questions that they never encountered before in Samoa have now become a hindrance in their new home where their identity as Samoan Christians becomes an issue. They no longer have the identity of a Samoan Christian alone, but now have to implement and contribute to the reality of their new identity in their home, which is Samoan American Christian.

I have already discussed the Samoan pastor's spiritual image. And this image has been one of the social concerns of the Samoan immigrant in the United States, which calls for a new kind of leader, a religious leader. I am sure this is the same dilemma that other Samoan immigrants have in other cultures around the globe. After all, culture always changing and dynamic, but never static. And what happens here with the Samoan immigrants, is that they need a new community leader. Samoan people are no longer living in villages and an extended family household. Their communal concept of family and village has now been challenged with the individual concept in America. And for that reason, it is a call for a new kind of leader for a new kind community. It is a call for a new social kind of leader for a community that is in diaspora. This calls for a leader who is relevant and vital, and, more important who refocuses and redirects the concerns and the attention of the Church to meet the social and spiritual needs of the Samoan people.

The role of the Samoan minister is now being challenged in their new environment, by the problems and issues arise. This was never an issue in Samoa during the missionary time. These types of questions were never asked. The pastor in Samoa was never looked upon as a community leader. His roles were limited to spiritual things. And the chiefs encouraged such distinction, because their power would be somehow be threatened by the minister's authority. This distinction is a misrepresentation of the definition of spirituality. Samoans chiefs have always been politically oriented people. And the Christian faith was unable to penetrate the fence line of that part of the Samoan culture.

This is perhaps the greatest challenge that the young generations of ministers are facing in the Samoan church. We are encountering a dualistic thinking that is no longer valid or makes sense. It only brings frustration and pain to the people. It robs them of their humanity and their God-given rights as a community of faith. It has failed to meet the needs of the people not only in Samoa, but as well in their new homeland. Therefore, I propose that we look at some of our Samoan traditions and values, and attempt to journey on a theological process that will meet the need of the people.

In a society and community that developed the art of oratory as its highest form of art, the minister can become an influential figure, who can insure the future of Christianity in the Samoan community when cultural values and traditions are properly processed within the community of faith. And the awareness of the Samoan pastor regarding a new theology and its place within the Samoan traditions and values, will begin a new movement in the 21st century, preparing our people to understand and

appreciate the unconditional love and the freedom of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

I can see the ministries of preaching and teaching as one the significant tools in reforming and reshaping Samoan Christianity. The power of the Samoan culture is in the art of oratory, and in authority. This will make a tremendous impact on Christian preaching and teaching if it is effectively used. The right and justified changes are always challenging and unpopular, but it is our duty and calling as Christian leaders to make our younger pastors and misters aware of the problems as I see them. I see Process Theology as a way to seek and recover, as well as apply, the Samoan traditions and values in order to construct a relational theology of the fa'a-Samoan for the sake of Samoan Christians as well as for other community of faiths.

## Chapter 4

### Construction of a Relational Theology of Fa'a-Samoa

#### Preliminary Discussion

A relational theology of the Fa'a-Samoa (Samoan ways of living) must be relevant and make sense not only for the Samoans in their new homeland, but for Samoans who are currently living in the islands, as well being more meaningful to a global and universal understanding of the Christian message. The experiences of the Samoans were traced and rooted back to their homeland. And that was the purpose of the third Chapter, to deal with historical developments of the Samoan culture and the Christian message, which was the beginning of the Missionary era and activity in Samoa. In other words, we cannot do theology without taking the context or setting into consideration. A theology is relevant when it takes seriously the historical and cultural context in which one lives and works. Doing theology is to be real within the situation. Gustavo Gutierrez, a Latin liberation theologian defines theology as “critical reflection on historical praxis.<sup>1</sup>” Doing theology requires the theologian to be born out of his or her own socio-political history. Theology is not just a set of systems of truths, but a dynamic of ongoing events in cultural diversities of backgrounds.

Also in this chapter I will identify some of the Samoan traditions and values that are relational, and apply them to the Christian message through integration and transformation. If the Samoan church is to be successful in its mission in this century; the church must sincerely develop its understanding of the gospel, and seek to

---

<sup>1</sup> Gustavo Gutierrez, A Theology of Liberation, trans. and ed. Sister Caridad Inda and John Eagleson (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1973), 11.

relate it and apply it to traditions and values of the Samoan culture. This reality is made up of Samoa's fundamental knowledge of human existence as determined by their own cultural values. The new changes have come about in Samoa's, economic, political, moral and religious teaching as a result of the influence of modern western technology, and the Samoans' persistence in accepting Christianity to shaping their cultural, political and religious life within the teaching of Christianity.

Moreover, it is very important that the Samoans be knowledgeable of their Christian faith through their own cultural background, rather than some foreign and imported interpretations of western civilization including Christianity. The western missionaries not only brought the gospel, but they brought the soil as well. The Samoan Christians will have a better appreciation of the gospel if they can see it through their own cultural background or heritage. But more importantly, they will be proud of their culture and appreciate God's love through their own understanding that even in their not so famous heritage, it reveals God's plan for them. This will be beneficial for them and provide new ideas for them to promote and elevate those cultural values and traditions that are more meaningful to their own life. I believe that in this way Samoa can make a productive contribution toward the world of pluralism and the technological age, by the varieties of infrastructures to which Samoans belong.

Hence, I will discuss on the transformation of culture, as well as the integration of the Samoan culture. The second part of the chapter is a process ecclesiology for the Samoan church using the various traditional values and individuals of the Samoan culture

that reveal the concept of relationship; for example the special occasions and ceremonies, and the extended family and its members. In other words, persons cannot be fully human if they separate themselves from the culture and particular settings in which they were born and raised.

### Integration with the Culture

The task for this project is not only to teach the Samoan Christians about the importance of their culture, but to apply them to the Christian faith to find ways to express our faith using our traditional values of relationship. This has been agreed upon by Marjorie H. Suchocki,

And if the dominant understanding of the world is through categories of interrelationship, process, and relativity, then this sensitivity must be picked up by the language of faith. Theology, as the way we interpret existence in a world where God is for us, will then be expressed in relational language, and the church that embodies the theology will likewise deepen its relational sensitivity in mission and structure.<sup>2</sup>

In other words, we need to make use of the language of the culture, not only the language of the church, in transmitting the Christian message. We need to make use of mythologies, legends, symbols, images, and stories of people as valid resources to bring back to the people the heart of the Christian faith. Needless to say, the people's cultural values should be utilized as a vehicle to interpret the Christian message so that it may become integrated into the appreciation of those with whom we come into contact daily. Ministers and pastors should be part of the people and culture if they want to present the message effectively. It is practically necessary to be concerned about and serve people of

---

<sup>2</sup> Marjorie Hewitt Suchocki, God, Christ, Church: A Practical Guide to Process Theology (New York: Crossroad Publishing, 1982), 1-2.

the community of faith rather than some set of theories or doctrines which have been shaped from some far away places, such as the western cultures. Latin liberation theologians experienced the same problem; their continent was victimized by colonialism, imperialism, and multinational corporations. The third world nations in their economic situations were controlled by decisions made in New York, Los Angeles, and London. Classical theology that was shaped by the western culture has the inclination of despising the popular expressions of faith in a Samoan setting or any other cultural settings. A better way for Samoan Christians to understand God is to use their cultural values and traditions. According to C.S. Song, it is vital for Asian people to consider “an Asian way to recover the message and witness of Jesus in our own cultural and historical settings, and to reconstitute the role of the Christian church in the world of Asia in which the Christians make up only three percent of the total population”<sup>3</sup>

The Gospel must be seen through the lens of the Samoan culture and understood through the Samoan spirituality. This was pointed out by some of the Pacific educators who had a theological consultation in Bergengren House in Suva, Fiji. One of the key issues they discussed was spirituality in the Pacific. Dr. S. Havea, a Pacific educator who attended the consultation, spoke on “The Pacific and Theology in World Perspective:”

One of our problem in the Churches in the Pacific is the FOREIGNNESS of the Gospel to the people..... Personally, I have been troubled by thinking that the Gospel is a “second-hand” message, original and warm, straight from the lips of Jesus.... I have tried to overcome this “foreignness” by making myself believe that effectiveness of the Good News was Simultaneous.... The Good News was already “there” and missionaries only communicated the already present message to them. They were uncovering to the mission fields what was rooted in the native soil and thus made people aware of its already presence. So the Gospel

---

<sup>3</sup> C. S. Song, Third-Eye-Theology ( Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1986), 2.



became effective because it was growing out of Native Soil. Therefore the Gospel became known and had grown out of the local culture.<sup>4</sup>

The Gospel must be relevant to the people in their particular setting. It must be part of the people's everyday life. The Gospel must be simple for the Pacific people, for their life style is simple. Spirituality in the Pacific is very simple and laid back. And this is one of the qualities that the world is losing its grip on. Dr. Havea indicates that,

the Pacific holds certain qualities that the world is starting to look back to us because they have they have completely lost them. The simplicity of our Christian faith; the total dependence in the moving and saving power of the Holy Spirit; the love and respect of elderly folks, the hospitality of the community of the poor- these qualities can hardly be found today in the world.<sup>5</sup>

The values of the ancient Samoan culture have been underestimated by the missionaries. Many harmless social customs have been condemned by missionaries and rejected by converts, and that has created a misunderstanding within the Samoan community.

Certainly, the Samoan community needs the Gospel to be indigenized with a Samoan identity. It is imperative that a proper understanding of God's word has to have a relationship to our social and cultural setting. In that way, it will provide a better understanding of how Samoan people understand God.

### Transformation of the Culture

Transformation is a sign of renewal. It is a sign of life. People and communities only survive by accepting transformations in which the expired will be taken off, just like

---

<sup>4</sup> Gabriele Daunivucu, Toward a Relevant Pacific Theology: The Role of the Church and Theological Education. ( Suva, Fiji, Lotu Pasifica Productions, 1986), 97.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 97.

when a brown coconut reaches its fullness of time, then it falls off and take root again. In a matter of time, a new life has been transformed and renewed. It is certain that every culture has its negative connotation and downfall. The Gospel, being referred to as the salt of the earth, must transform and penetrate every level and every frequency of culture. A relational theology of the Fa'a-Samoa will help reshape, refashion, and reform the people who are living within their culture. Transformation takes place on both individual and community or social levels. In a deeper sense, the relational theology of the Fa'a-Samoa needs to be engaged in the transformation of people and culture. Mary Elizabeth Moore indicates,

Transformation is important, but not transcendence in the sense of moving beyond culture. The other alternative is not very promising. Encountering persons apart from their culture is an extreme of abstraction and individualism; it fosters a tendency, often unconscious, to judge others through our own cultural lenses. In this case, the encounter is superficial, partial, and misleading.<sup>6</sup>

In other words, transformation is needed for people to awaken their spirit and arouse their passion about the misleading aspects of their cultural background. This is important when individuals know themselves within their social relationships. This is basic in human vocation. We create culture, and culture is a vehicle that serves the basic needs of humans. We are not defined by our culture but we define and determine our culture.

Clearly, Samoan culture as well as traditional and classical theology has a patriarchal concept. It has ignored and rejected women and women's experience. The lost and rejected images of women have affected the roles that women play in both the

---

<sup>6</sup> Mary Elizabeth Moore, Teaching from the Heart ((Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991), 184-85

church and society. In such a context, transformation is needed to reshape and refashion an equal opportunity for a theological movement within the church. In the Samoan community of faith, women make up a large size of the church. However, the church for a long time has denied the women's place in its structure. In most Samoan churches the person who is always occupying the pulpit is a man. Rightly so, the women should have equal opportunity with men in the church where they feel God has called them. I believe male and female have both been called by God to be pastors. Traditions are not easily changed. However, changes are easily made when people understand why changes are necessary. We need to make an effort to include both men and women in the leadership of our churches. Although a resolution was finally passed at the General Assembly of 2005 by the Congregational Christian Church of American Samoa, from 160 years since missionaries brought the gospel, to allow women to enter the Kanana Fou Theological Seminary in American Samoa; and go on to become pastors when there is a call from a congregation. But it is a transformation of a new beginning of sufficient changes for the gospel and ministry of God in the Samoan Christian community.

Transformation comes out of an experience of controlling and oppression. But it is an effort to interpret the quest for salvation as a journey toward freedom and liberation. In Gutierrez's words, "humankind is seen as assuming conscious responsibility for its own destiny. This understanding provides a dynamic context and broadens the horizons of the desired social changes."<sup>7</sup> In other words, Gutierrez is referring to the gradual expansion of human freedom that has taken place in the long course of history, whereby

---

<sup>7</sup> Gutierrez, 24.

freedom means the ability of human beings to have gradually acquired and taken charge of their own destiny, by transforming the natural and social conditions of their existence. Transformation of culture takes place when going back to the culture that is embedded in the matrix or the womb of the nation. The Gospel is the measuring rod for the engagement in the task of transformation of the culture. Christ transformed the church so the church can transform the culture and the world. Richard Niebuhr's fifth main viewpoint concerning the relation between Christ and culture, Christ as Transformer of culture. He talks about a conversionist model, a spirit of conversion. Niebuhr talks about culture and humanity been fallen and perverted. And with Christ all of humanity and culture are been lifted up and transformed. Conversion is necessary in all elements of human culture. And the church as a community of faith needs to participate in the work of God, to transform the world and give human hope and possibility.

### Process Theology as a Relational Theology

#### Basic Concepts of Process Theology

Process theology is founded on the Philosophy of Organism. It reveals the concept of relationship because of its understanding that events or sequences of events are related or interconnected from event to event. Process theology calls these events "actual occasions," or basic units of reality. Mellert indicates that "the concept of actual occasion is the central notion of Whiteheadian thought. Actual occasions, or drops of experience, are the final real things of which the world is made, and there is no going behind them to find anything more real."<sup>8</sup> Whitehead defines this occasion as something

---

<sup>8</sup> Robert B. Mellert, What is Process Theology? An Introduction to the Philosophy of Alfred North Whitehead, and How It Is Applied to Christian Thought, (New York: Paulist Press, 1975), 21-22.

real and concrete. By occasions, he means that reality is a happening, an event. For Marjorie Hewitt Suchocki, “each element draws from the transmitted energies of its past, combing these energies in a creative movement toward its own actuality. Thus feelings from the past are incorporated into the present; the relationship to the past is internal.”<sup>9</sup> John Cobb stresses the idea “that to be actual is to be in process. Anything which is not a process, is an abstraction from process, not full-fledged actuality.”<sup>10</sup> In other words, every particle of our reality is related to a whole part of realities for its existence, meaning, and origin as well as its value. Daniel Day Williams says that “actual entities are subjects. They are centers of feeling, which hold together the many strands of relatedness to other things in one determined outcome which is a specific satisfaction.”<sup>11</sup>

Mellert emphasizes that, “to know something requires knowledge of its environment and context, because nothings exists in isolation.”<sup>12</sup> An actual occasion prehends or takes hold of events and experiences that have taken place in the past. There is always a continuous relationship of the past and the present. Prehensions or feelings are more evident and factual for building relationships. For Cobb, “prehensions is a process in which one directly grasps previous events, which themselves haveprehend previous ones”<sup>13</sup> In other words, changes are happening in present events and some of these changes are caused by the past events. Elwell mentions,

---

<sup>9</sup> Suchocki, 12.

<sup>10</sup> Cobb, 14.

<sup>11</sup> Daniel Day Williams, Essays in Process Theology (Chicago: Illinois Exploration Press, 1985), 103.

<sup>12</sup> Mellert, 14

<sup>13</sup> Cobb, 14.

Whitehead uses the term *prehend* to refer to a feeling or grasping of the physical and conceptual data of actual entities. By prehending each other, actual entities are internally related instead of externally related, as in materialistic or mechanistic philosophies.<sup>14</sup>

In other words, the entities are not isolated or independent beings, but are present in other actual entities as inter-related moments of an ongoing process. In the Samoan extended family entity, for example; everyone is related to each other. The relationship is made up of persons of all different generations related by birth, marriage or adoption. While the Samoan extended family can range in size from 30 or 40 to more than hundreds of members, the average Samoan household is made up of about 9 to 10 family members and close relatives. Every member of the extended family has a role to perform for the harmony and the enjoyment of the family. Marjorie Suchocki stressed further this concept,

we have considered existence as a series of instances of becoming. This becoming is through relational. Relativity is therefore constitutive of existence and not simply accidental to it. Becoming takes place in the creative response to the past; in this becoming something new comes into existence.<sup>15</sup>

The past is imminently incorporated into the present and becomes part of the present. For example, I feel and *prehend* the past, and the past influences or shapes my being. In this moment of becoming, I am responding to a complete and pure possibility of the future. As I attempt to discover and realize the potentialities of my present moment, I therefore seek fulfillment. Process thought conveys the idea that anything that

---

<sup>14</sup> David W. Diehl, in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Walter A. Elwell, (Grand Rapids: Baker House, 1987), 881.

<sup>15</sup> Suchocki, 31.

becomes actual or existing has some potential for novelty or change. Also, in the Samoan extended family, the matai cares for the welfare of every member of the family. When there is a need for fulfillment and assistance by any member of the extended family, each member is required to share their crops, goods and financial resources with the extended family. In return, members of the family will support them as well. Decisions about the distribution of these resources are made by the matai. Resources for circle of life events, such as birth, weddings and funerals, as well as important occurrences such as travel abroad, and educational or medical needs, are raised through family fundraising. This is the revelation of potentials of the many possibilities that the matai, who is the leader, can discover from family members by pulling together for a need.

In process thought, there are two kinds of prehension, physical and conceptual. For Suchocki, "Each occasion of existence is both mental and physical, with the physical being defined as feelings of the past, and the mental being capacity to generalize the past and to grasp a new possibility in relation to the past"<sup>16</sup> "Physical prehension relates the emerging entity to the actual occasions of the immediate past that are within its scope and enables it to free them."<sup>17</sup> The conceptual prehension or the mental pole is understood as a grasp of possibility. The mental pole takes feeling from occasion and influence from making of decision. The mental pole of every actual occasion is a grasp of possibility that comes to it not simply from the past but also from the future. The

---

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 52

<sup>17</sup> Mellert, 24.

additional repeating of the prehensions or feeling of the past by an actual entity rests solely on the ability it prehends physically. Moreover, this is true to the conceptual prehension. The more novelty or changes introduced, the more that actual occasion prehends conceptually.

The determination of an actual occasion is found in the interaction between the subject of the occasion, prehending data of past occasions or the external objects being prehended. This interaction is established by the subject's forms, including emotions, purposes, adversaries, aversions, and consciousness. Mellert notes,

every act of prehending has its subjective form, but not every prehension contributed its datum to the emerging occasion. This is the reason for distinguishing between positive and negative prehension. A prehension whose datum is included as a constitutive aspect of the occasion is a positive prehension; one in which the datum is eliminated from feeling is called a negative prehension.<sup>18</sup>

Every actual occasion lives on, contributing its reality to the occasion that succeeds it. In process thought this is known as objective immortality. This is the idea of events living in the future. John Cobb indicates that “the past experience is in the present experience objectively, not subjectively as objectified by and hence incarnated in the present.”<sup>19</sup> I believe there is a concept of relationship in the Fa’a-Samoa traditions that can identify with such a process statement. For example, when there is a death of a member in the Samoan family all the members pull together. No matter how far family members scatter, moving to different islands or countries, they will come together for the funeral. The family members come to pay their respect and love for the life that

---

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 26.

<sup>19</sup> Cobb, 23.



they had shared with the departed member. Although the family member passed away, and can not participate in the family events in the present, his or her life is lived out, and witnessed through the life of the children and the bonds among the extended family. Mellert has a different emphasis concerning the actual occasion. He holds that “after the actual occasion achieves its subject aim and reaches its own particular satisfaction, it perishes.”<sup>20</sup> Although it is perishes, it is not lost, because it can still be experienced. It becomes an objective datum for a future occasion and is considered in continuous process.

This concept of process is identical to the treatment of death in traditional Samoan custom. When the sad news of a deceased person is heard through the village, the pastor prepares the village for rehearsal of hymns for their singing. The women’s fellowship prepares flowers and provides monetary contributions to the bereaved family. Friends of families and relatives from other islands begin to arrive with gifts, tapa, and financial support. The support given to the bereaved family is a sign of love and caring, a sign of relatedness and interconnectedness within the extended family. It is a sign of support and contribution by every family member to an occasion.

The Samoan people believe that the dead person has perished, but is never lost or completely gone from their minds and hearts. Their love for the departed person does not stop at the funeral rituals, but there is a period of mourning. This period of mourning is observed for about a year. During that year, every day the grave is decorated with flowers and leis. When one year of mourning is completed, the pastor will conduct a

---

<sup>20</sup> Mellert, 27.

memorial service with the presence of the family members at the burial site. After a short service, food will be served, and the bereaved family will be able to move on with their lives. Although, the actual occasion of death achieves its particular satisfaction, but it will never lose its experience from the family.

Each actual occasion has its own unique synthesis of its past. Each furnishes its own actualization to the totality of reality. Each becomes part of the many and add itself to the complex environment that produces a new occasion. When the new occasion achieves satisfaction, it perishes, opening the path to continue. In Whitehead's term, this is creativity, "the many become one and are increased by one." For Mellert, "it is the ultimate principle by which the multiplicity of relevant data become one actual occasion, illustrating the fact that it is the nature of things that the many enter into complex unity."<sup>21</sup> Suchocki has a similar view that "creativity is the unification process of feeling many influences, evaluating them, and selectively integrating them according to one's own purpose. This creative process is the emergence of one from many. One, many and creativity are all essential terms for understanding relational existence."<sup>22</sup>

In process thought, not only does the past influence the actual entity, but so does God. God influences an actual entity through God's initial aim. The initial aim begins and originates in God. God influences the present through God's persuasive and empowering love that leads an actual entity to real possibilities in the future. God feels every moment of the actual entities in the past, therefore knows the best possibility for an

---

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 28.

<sup>22</sup> Suchocki, 8.

occasion. Any present occasion is influenced by both the past and God. The fullness of the past is integrated with the present and hope for the future, and this is known as creative transformation. As the Samoans witnessed at the ava ceremony, when the matai received his cup of ava liquid, he would first pour some ava liquid on the ground. This is a symbol of thanking the god Tagaloa for the blessing of good health, protection, the bounty of land and sea, and the bringing together of people to this happy occasion. The Samoans believe that it is always Tagaloa that brings blessing to the people of the community as well as their land. There is always that relationship the Samoans believe that has connected the people, the land and Tagaloa. Also, this reveals that Tagaloa is always in their midst protecting them and offers what is best for them.

The Samoan Christians see that God influences the world as they experience God in their traditional belief. The Samoans are a very religious people. Their culture is a religious culture, and that is why everything Samoans believe is attributed to God. As a Samoan pastor in our congregation and community, I have witnessed that every time a student of our congregation receives an award from school academics or sports, or a parishioner has a job promotion, a mother has a new born baby, a person prepares before and after surgery etc., I am always called by members of our congregation to say a short service of thanksgiving to God. Samoans believe that without God, there is no sense for living. In other words, God is centered in every Samoan spirit. Freeman supports this statement by saying,

Pagan Samoans, firmly believed that if in their daily lives there was no prayer to Tagaloa there could be no blessing. Prayers, with appropriate offerings, were made on all occasions of any importance, such as before going to fish, before planting some fresh section of bush land, and also in

times of sickness and war<sup>23</sup>

### The Concept of Self or Individual in Process Theology

In process theology, self, or individual, is understood as a very complex actual entity. Each part of self or individual, contributes to the building up of the self. The parts of the self also influence the self, not only in one's own past but the past of the entire world. The self is part of the world, as much as the world is part of the self. This worldview fits closely with the traditional Samoan view of the self as relational.

Moreover, process theology, like the Samoan culture, understands the concept of individual from its perspective of personhood, 'person of the community.' Not only things that are external to the individual, but also things that are internal to the individual, make up the self. An individual is an integrated person consisting of different actual occasion. The present and past influences of experiences and God's initial aim really make a person, a community and the world.

In the remainder of this chapter I will attempt to construct a relational theology of the Fa'a-Samoa, using process theology as a guide for discussion. I will introduce some of the Samoan traditions and values that have a relational concept and integrate them with the Christian message.

### Process Ecclesiology for the Samoan Church

#### Samoan Traditions and Values Related to Process Theology.

We have witnessed and experienced in the Samoan tradition and process theology, that the predominant concept of relationship is to be seen in both sides of an

---

<sup>23</sup> Freeman, 182

understanding of relationship. In the Samoan tradition, relationship is explained through a person's responsibilities, work, love, pain and care. The contribution by each family member to the occasion is also part of the relationship. The Samoans live in cooperation with each other with a sense of communal life. Similar to process thought, that relationship is revealed by the idea of an actual entity related to it and the context in which it exists. An actual entity is described through relations. The relationship of the past, the environment, and even God constitute what an actual entity means. For example, the extended family is an actual entity. A family can never be a family if it does not have a relationship with other family individuals. A family will not claim its creditability if does not have a relationship. The family can only be understood through its relationship between the family and its members. The family prehends and feels the influences from the past, from God, from external and internal influences. Suchocki indicates that

Every single unit of existence or actual occasion in the world begins with physical feelings, and the most important of these feelings is the one from God. This feeling received from God is directive, offering a possibility for the occasion's best future. It is as if every becoming occasion in the world begins with the touch of God, called by Whitehead the "initial aim." This aim received from God orients the occasion toward an optimum way of harmonizing the feelings of the past received from the world.<sup>24</sup>

In other words, these influences will help the family develop and attain real possibilities or novelty in the family's future. It will create new experiences for the present. This relationship can only be manifested and become possible through love. It is love and caring for each other, security and dignity that maintain the involvement of the life of the

---

<sup>24</sup> Suchocki, 39

extended family. In process thought, God operates with relational power. This power, has the ability to both affected and to be affected. C. Robert Mesle looks at God's relational power in three stages:

First, relational power is the ability, the power, to be open, to be sensitive, to being relationship with the world about us.... parents who are sensitive to the feelings, struggles, fears, and hopes of their children. Second, relational power is the ability to be self-creative. It is the capacity to take in a wide range of ideas, feelings, influences, and experiences and create one's own thoughts and feelings and decisions out of them. Self-creativity is the ability to integrate the world into a unified self, rich in relation but unique in response. Finally, relational power is the ability to influence others by having first been influenced by them. It is power of loving parents to act toward their children in a way that takes sensitive account of the needs and desires of their children, while looking beyond the childish perspective. It is the insights and limitations of the students so as to help them learn in appropriate and creative steps.<sup>25</sup>

Gandhi is a prime example of relational power. Rather than sit in a tent with the wealthy and the powerful few, he went to live with many unfortunates, share their work and eat their food. Gandhi understood them by participation with them in their fears, hungers, and dreams. He had the capacity to suffer, to be affected by them, and he effected them without losing himself. Gandhi did not alienate or shut himself from them but he involved himself and created a vision by having a relationship with them. And because of his courage to create a vision, people followed him. Gandhi built a vision that was greater than them.

### Significance of the Samoan Extended Family and Process Theology

The extended family in the Samoan tradition can be compared to the church as the fellowship or the family of God. It is a single unit or a corporate body consisting of different individuals, related through blood, marriage or adoption, who have particular

---

<sup>25</sup> C. Robert Mesle, Process Theology: A Basic Introduction, (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 1993), 30.

roles, responsibilities and happiness within the bounds of the family. Their safety, identity and dignity are protected and maintained through their participation and involvement in the life of the family. They exist to serve the extended family, and their value as individuals will be determined by how they demonstrate themselves in the embodiment of the family. The extended family is an everyday fact of life for every individual as well as in relation to one another. The strength of a Samoan extended family is in its numbers and unity. They pull together for a unified effort.

The Samoan extended family is the central figure for Samoan culture and spirituality. In this concept, God could be seen as communal or relational in the extended family, in which most Samoans begin to understand Christianity as something meaningful to their lives. Individualism has no place in the Samoan extended family. Unlike western individualism, a person is nothing without his or her family. Everyone is responsible for each other. It is always a collective effort when work or entertainment is planned. Anyone who hinders the aims and goals of the Samoan family is labeled as being selfish or openly rebellious in opposition to the normal function and harmony of the family.

In the process understanding of God there is that similarity with the Samoan traditional concept of relation. God is referred to as a relational Being and is intertwined in the process of many into one. The experiences of the past create new experiences for the present. For Suchocki, “the entity is one of the many other entities in the universe, placing its own demands upon a new present to come into being.”<sup>26</sup> In reference to God

---

<sup>26</sup> Suchocki, 28.

as a relational Being, this relationship is possible through the power of love. It is the love of God that creates a relationship. The unity of God creates a personal relationship. For human beings to understand God they need to have a relationship with God. For instance, for a son to understand his father is to have a relationship with him. And this is also the common predicament of everyday relationships. We cannot speak of relationship of love with another person unless we have some kind of relationship with that person.

In the Samoan ava ceremony, which I have described in the previous pages, that once the matai receives his ava, he first holds the ava cup level to his forehead, uttering the first and foremost ava to god, commonly known in Samoa Tagaloa, then respectfully pours a small amount of ava liquid on the ground. This is a token of thanksgiving and appreciation to Tagaloa for protection of the people, for blessing of the land and nature as well as the earth, and making this occasion possible. Another example of Samoan view of people being connected to nature is that Samoan use different kinds of plants as Samoan medicines for treatment. For example, Samoans use the fuasina plant for wounds, the lafa plant to treat ringworms, the ma'anunu for high blood pressure, and many other plants. The Samoans have used these Samoan plants for medicines, and survived on them for many years, long before Christianity arrived on the shores of the Samoan islands.

Jesus speaks of his relationship with his Father, God. Jesus said, “The Father and I are one.”<sup>27</sup> Jesus had a very special and personal relationship with God, his Father.

---

<sup>27</sup> John 10:30 (NRSV).



And because of that close relationship Jesus had with his father, he was willing to do whatever his father had called for him to do. We can recall that event in the garden of Gethsemane as recorded by the Gospels. Jesus was in the darkest hour of making a decision for his life. And because of Jesus' love for humanity and obedience to his Father, he chose to accept the challenge and went on to die on the cross. He chose to be fully responsive to God's call and love. Jesus' life and death revealed the character of God's love and God's call to each of us. It was Jesus' personal relationship with God that led to his death. In other words, Jesus lived out a relational power. Paul's letter to Corinthians (1 Cor. 1: 18vvs) was crucial for this insight, that it was the crucified Christ, the Christ who experienced suffering who brought redemption to the world. It was the revelation of wisdom and the power of God.

In other words, according to process thought, the nature of God has been witnessed through the life of Jesus. In Jesus' earthly life, God experiences the world, and the world experiences the nature of God. In the death of Jesus, God took upon all the sins of the world, and experienced them. In the resurrection, the world witnessed the glory of God. In the Spirit, we feel and experience the presence of God. The Spirit brings together the many into one, the unity in diversity.

Likewise, the Samoan understanding of God as relational and communal is witnessed in the Samoan family structure, which are the matai, the taule'ale'a, and the tina. These three elements are interwoven to reflect the nature of three in one. The members are distinct in their roles but work together for the benefit of one, which is the family.

The understanding of God in the Samoan extended family is communal or

relational as in process thinking. This view will help me understand God better. This is just one of the many ways of harmonizing my understanding of God. The understanding of God within the Samoan extended family is communal. The extended family is the fabric of, or the heart beat of, the Samoan culture. In the extended family there is love, protection, harmony, peace, order, guidance, discipline, and support for every member of the family. These elements reflect the attributes and nature of God.

The creation from the beginning of time, as told in the book of Genesis, was in chaos and void, full of emptiness and darkness. But when the Spirit of God moved upon this chaotic and dark stage of creation, the creation became harmonized and organized (Gen. 1:1-5). God is revealed through creation and Creation is God's nature. When God is in creation, then creation becomes the nature of God. When God's communal nature is revealed in the Samoan extended family as well as in nature, the family then becomes the nature of God in the Samoan context of the family. Unity in the Samoan family will always exist as long as the family members are attached to each other. The strength of the Samoan family lies in the corporate and combined effort. In process understanding, the relation with God is through a weaving process of many into one, or many becoming one. In other words, everyone participates in constituting the very being of one another and God participates in making up our being, so that we participate in constituting the very being of God. When we detach ourselves from each other, God is no longer present in our midst. God is no longer personal. Likewise, when the Samoan family detaches itself from feeling responsible for the members of the extended family, individualism occurs, and consequently God is no longer communal and relational in the

family.

In process understanding, the initial aim originates from God. Suchocki indicates that “the aims of God pull the world toward complexity and harmony so that in its own way the world might be reflective of God; the aims of God pull the world toward the image of God.”<sup>28</sup> This understanding reveals God’s nature and purpose in the world. It brings the world together to God. God is working out the best possibility for the world. God does not decide for us, but creates the best possibility for us. God influences the world upon us. God is changeable. In other words, God is fully responsive to the world. In each movement God shares the experience of every creature and human being. Also, God responds to every creature and human being as well. God’s love is responsive, and God is affected by the world. God is revealed in the world and at the same time is hidden in the world.

A relational and communal God in the Samoan family also offers possibilities for what is best for Samoan families. God influences the possibilities of decision making through the Samoan matai. It is the aim of the matai to decide what is best for the Samoan family and its members. And his decisions are influence by the initial aim of God. The matai is known as the family priest or the spiritual leader for the family. It is compulsory in the Samoan extended family that every morning and evening, a ritual prayer is offered to God before the start of the day or the closing of the day. The prayer offered in the morning is to thank God for a new day as well as asking God for protection and safe keeping of the family members as they go out in their daily chores.

---

<sup>28</sup> Suchocki, 45

Secondly, the matai prays to God to grant him the wisdom, discernment and knowledge to make wise and meaningful decisions in leading his extended family. The evening prayer is a thanksgiving prayer, offered to God for God's guidance and protection of the family as they scattered throughout their daily duties, either fishing or working in the plantation or working in the home. This absolute process is done with the clear consciousness that God shares the experience of every individual in the family. That God feels, hears, was present in their midst as they were performing their daily duties. God provides all the possibilities to empower the spirit of oneness and harmony within the Samoan extended family. The beliefs behind these customs are very similar to the process-relational understanding of the world.

For God who is present in the world as indicated by process understanding, God's presence is revealed in creation. God feels the world and offers the best possibilities for the world. God feels our hurt. God suffers with the world. For Mesle, "if God cannot suffer, cannot be affected in any way, then God cannot love. To love is to be affected. To love is to enter into intimate relation with others. To love is to feel all the passions of joy, sorrow, grief, fear, hope, and triumph that bind us to each other, that make life so dynamic and changeable."<sup>29</sup> God provides for us every moment, loving us, and luring us to the best possibilities. God continues to love us regardless our of shortcomings and failures in life. God shares the life of the world, of the creatures as well as all human beings. God present in the world is also present in the Samoan extended family. The Samoan family can experience God's presence in their midst, and

---

<sup>29</sup> Mesle, 29.

that experience can be transferred to the village and the wider Samoan community as well. Suchocki expounded on this notion and further explained the reality of this experience of the Samoan family:

The inward presence of God turns to the outward presence of God, for the God who is present to us is present to others as well. The God who guides us guides others also; the God who cares for us cares also for others. The whole world is touched by God, and therefore the world can mediate God's presence to us.<sup>30</sup>

God feels the world, and the world feels the presence of God. Likewise the Samoan family is felt by God. When love is violated within the Samoan family, God feels the violation of that love as well, because God feels every moment of every situation of human life. God touches every part of our being. In our lonely and unfortunate moments of life we touch God, and we are also touched by God. When unfortunate moments of our lives touch God, then a process of integration begins. Mesle suggests that,

God's love is both responsive and creative. God continually responds to the actual situations of the world to call people toward the good. and God's love is creative because there are many different ways in which God can create good in the world. So there is a combination of people perceiving God differently because of their different cultural experiences, and of God responding by working in different ways with people in different cultures.<sup>31</sup>

The divine nature of God integrates with the immanent nature of human beings; and the result of that will be a creative transformation for a positive outcome for the goodness of all people. God responds to our suffering and creates something good and positive out of

---

<sup>30</sup> Suchocki, 61.

<sup>31</sup> Mesle, 101.

an unfortunate and bad situation. What we witness here is the pure nature of God, which is love.

In the previous chapters I mentioned the individuals within the Samoan extended families. They are the Matai (chief/father), the Tina (mother) the fanau (children/boy and girl), and the Tautua (servant). These elements comprise or make up a Samoan family/extended family. It is the interweaving of these facets that create a Samoan family. It is the many becoming one that creates the Samoan family, the unity in diversity. In process thought, “unity in diversity” refers to the concept of creativity, the many and the one. Suchocki mentions that

unification must be a process of feeling many influences, evaluating them, and selectively integrating them according to one’s own purposes. This is creativity. This creative process is the emergence of one from many. “One,” “many,” and “creativity” are all essential terms for understanding relational existence.<sup>32</sup>

Creativity is the transition of the past moment to the present and to the future. It is the unification of all events. It is the many becoming the new one. Each family member has a distinct role in the family, but their role is to contribute to the social-economical, welfare of the Samoan family. Although their responsibilities are specific, they all work for the same cause which is the common good of the family.

In the Samoan concept of relationship, when these elements of the family work together, they bring complete and full life to the Samoan family. There is no life when relationship is not created and demonstrated. In process understanding, relationship is important and this is shown in the relationship of self to itself, the individual to God and

---

<sup>32</sup> Suchocki, 9

to the whole community. These two understandings reveal that an individual cannot consider him/herself as a complete creation if there is no relationship to others. In process understanding, a matai, faletua, or tautua will not have a full life if they do not consider the significance of their relationships to other, and will not inherit their true value as human beings to their family as well as the community. The Samoan concept of relationship can also relate to Jung Young Lee's concept of "Asian Trinitarian Thinking," when he indicates that, "when two, the yin and yang, are included in each other, they create a Trinitarian relationship. Since yin and yang are relational symbols, yin cannot exist without yang or yang without yin."<sup>33</sup> Likewise, in the Samoan concept of relationship in the extended family, a matai, tautua, or faletua cannot fully function in their roles if they are separated from their relationships within the family. The Samoan family cannot exist without the individuals, just as the yin cannot exist without the yang, and yang without the yin. For Lee, "where there is yin, there must be yang, and where there is yang, there must be yin."<sup>34</sup>

In process understanding we see through Jesus and his relationship with God the nature of his Father. Through Jesus' life in the world we experience the nature of God. For Suchocki, "If we see in Jesus a revelation of God for us, then the way Jesus loves is the way God loves."<sup>35</sup> In other words, Jesus is the incarnation of God's love for the world. In Jesus' death God took upon himself all the sins of the world. In Jesus'

---

<sup>33</sup> Jung Young Lee, The Trinity in Asian Perspective (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996), 58.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 58.

<sup>35</sup> Suchocki, 98.

resurrection, we witnessed the climax and the glory of God. In the Spirit, we internalized a personal encounter of God and Christ. The Spirit is the comforter that heals and connects people to the presence of God. It is the spirit of God that enables all of creation to participate in the divine activity of God. For Paul to the Corinthians, “For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body Jew or Greek, slaves or free—all we were made to drink of one Spirit.”<sup>36</sup> It is uniting together of the many into one. Likewise, it is the spirit of the Samoan mother in the Samoan family that unites the family. It is the mother’s spirit that anchors the unity and the strength of the Samoan extended family.

#### Ideal of the Ava Ceremony

I have already alluded elsewhere in our previous discussions that not only human beings reveal the concept of relationship in the Samoan traditions and values. It is also seen in the relationship of people and plants. In the Samoan traditions as seen in the Ava and Usu ceremony and Samoan plants for medicines, we can witness how Samoan people extend their relationship to the earth and the world. They have considered the earth and the plants as part of their existence and setting. The process understanding is that relationship does not limit itself to humans only, but has connections and relationships beyond human limitations. Mesle indicates that,

God enters into the experience of every creature in every moment in the infinite history of the universe, making freedom and values possible. In different words, every creature experiences God’s loving care for its moment of creativity. Each creative moments is born in God’s creative love.<sup>37</sup>

---

<sup>36</sup> I Corinthians 12:12-13 (NRSV).

<sup>37</sup> Mesle, 59.



This is to say that without God or without the divine spark of God, the world could not materialize or be substantiated. It is in God that every living creature and living thing is grounded, related and fashioned themselves.

In our Samoan traditions, there are ceremonies that contribute to the understanding of relationship. But the one ceremony that I want to share is the Ava ceremony. This ceremony is prestigious and dignified in the Samoan custom. It is a tradition that existed long before Christianity came to Samoa and is still very much practiced today. This is a sacred ceremony similar to that of a Samoan service to their supreme god, Tagaloa, in bringing together of the visitors and the hosting village people as a corporate body or actual occasion participating together in the partaking of the ava.

The ava ceremony is compared or can be compared to the Lord's Supper. I have already referenced in the previous chapters the detailed instructions of the ava but only the relational concept of the significant factors will be discussed here. After the high chief's ava cup has been served, the chief first pours a small amount of the ava liquid on the ground. The significance of this action is to show their supreme god Tagaloa that he is foremost, and given the most respect and honor, as well as thanking Tagaloa for his protection and care, that the visitors and the hosting village are able to get together in harmony, unity, peace and love, without any tragedy or discomfort. In process thought, God experiences our experiences, and for that God is always responsive to people's activities and to the world. God's primary aim for the world is for the world to have enjoyment. God cares for the world as well as for others. Suchocki indicates that

God's aim, however, is always toward correction and transformation; this is the faithfulness or grace of God. God's aims lead us toward

the wider past, toward the possibilities of the future, toward the mutuality of relationships.<sup>38</sup>

Also, the chief will thank Tagaloa for the blessing given to the earth for good soil, and good health. The important point here is the relationships of the individuals who make up the community and the participants, and the relationship of their communities to Tagaloa. Also, the other relationship that needs to be recognized is the relationship in caring for the land and the earth, which is being depicted in their concern for the welfare of the land. Cobb supports such a thought:

the land is the giver of life and the source of all good. In modern terminology, it is the factor of production. But it is much more than that. The people belong to the land and reverence it and gratefully receive its bounty. The land includes all the plants and animals that share it with people. The land is also the place of the people.<sup>39</sup>

Samoans have a belief that if the people keep the land in good care, in return, the land will bear sufficient food for the life of the people and their community.

The whole community conveys a valuable message that each individual of a society regardless of their age difference, whether it be children and wives, untitled men and women, or chiefs, they are all related either by their specific duties or by being part of the community. For process understanding, as stated by Leslie Muray, “my fulfillment of cannot be separated from the fulfillment of everyone and everything else. Fulfillment entails the notion that all creatures, all actualities drive towards the

---

<sup>38</sup> Suchocki, 40.

<sup>39</sup> Herman E. Daly and John B. Cobb, For the Common Good: Redirecting the Economy Toward Community, the Environment, and a Sustainable Future (Boston: Beacon Press, 1994), 100.

experience of beauty, richness of experience.”<sup>40</sup> In other words, no individual or actual occasion can attain satisfaction in isolation or separation from the varieties of experiences of the whole. For process understanding, God experiences every creature in the world. God reveals his presence in the world. And because God feels the world, God responds to the world by offering the best possibility for the world.

In our Eucharist, for example, Christians celebrate and commemorate the life of our Lord Jesus Christ. Christians participate by accepting the elements of the communion, which are the bread and wine. Christians accept the bread, to symbolize the body of our Lord Jesus Christ that has been broken for the forgiveness of our sins. The wine is drunk, to symbolize the blood of our Lord Jesus Christ that has been shed on the cross, for the forgiveness of our sins. By accepting these elements of the Eucharist, Christians profess the significance of oneness with Christ. Likewise in the *ava* ceremony, when the hosting village and visitors sit together and drink from that one cup, is a symbol of oneness. It is a sign of celebration of love and harmony, peace and unity; it is a token of thanking god Tagaloa for a safe journey. For process understanding, God creates aims for the world. God creates peace and harmony for every actual occasion. God lures everything toward the nature and image of God. Suchocki finds that “God not only affects the world, but the world affects God. God is present to the world, and the world is present to God.”<sup>41</sup>

God’s initial aim for the hosting village and the visitors are to be together in

---

<sup>40</sup> Leslie A. Muray, An Introduction to the Process Understanding of Sciences, Society and the Self: A Philosophy for the Modern man (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 1988), 8.

<sup>41</sup> Suchocki, 130.

harmony, in unity and in love and peace. However, the aim, according to Suchocki, “is still a possibility, and as possibility it carries implications of alternatives. The occasion has the power of decision over all its available alternatives.”<sup>42</sup> And if somehow an unfortunate disaster occurs and violates the aim from God which is harmony and uniting in peace for these two parties, Suchocki agrees that

God fashions aims for the world by integrating the actuality of the world within the divine nature. God’s aim toward harmony will necessarily enter into the initial aims given to the world, but each particular aim is also conditioned by what has happened in the world. Otherwise, there would be no relevance to the aim, and no real persuasive power. God works with the world as it is, luring it toward what it can become. The reality of the world conditions the relevance of the possibilities God can make available for the world. Jesus Christ, as the fullness of divine revelation in history, makes a difference to the kinds of aims now relevant to history.<sup>43</sup>

In other words, if the consequent nature which is the actual occasion, misrepresents the harmony and the initial aim that God offered for the two parties, then God’s integration must overcome the distortion, because God harmonizes distortion.

Another interesting point I need to raise is that, speeches are important during the ava ceremony. After the presentation of the ava cups to the visitors and to the hosting villagers, speeches and formal words will be exchanged by the matai/orators of the visitors and the matai/orators of the hosting village. The purpose of these speeches is to proclaim and to recognize the love of the god Tagaloa by both parties for bringing them safely together in harmony, as well as the official addressing and welcoming of the visitors. This is the routine and protocol of the Samoan culture when matai/high chiefs of

---

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 42.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 130.

the village meet. Suchocki supports the fact that

we are linguistic species; we express ourselves in words, and guard the words from generation to generation through oral or written tradition, as if we could defy the shifting nuances and changes of language. We continuously interpret ourselves in dialogue with our past through the texts we have accrued, or with one ourselves-we are a word afflicted species.<sup>44</sup>

On the other hand, words bring freedom to individuals and people of a community. Words can liberate us. Words can soar through time and place, through people communicating by words. And through communication we establish communities because words create relationships, and relationality. Speeches and words that have been communicated in Samoa for the past hundred years are still being used in communication not only in Samoa but have traveled throughout the world by the transmission of individuals and communities. The matai/talking chiefs during the ava and usu ceremony will also exchange speeches to express the purpose of the journey and visit. In the midst of all the wordiness that we share and utter, there comes a living word, the Christ. We interpret the Word of God. Likewise in process understanding, in the sacraments we are all invited to embrace the reality of the Word. Suchocki yes that,

Yes, we interpret that Word, too, and are invited to do so-but the sacraments, themselves interpreting that word for us, the living remind us again and again that we cannot tie that word into our texts and textuality, for the Word is no abstraction-the Word can be touched, tasted, and it is this concretely embodied word that finally frees and nourishes us. Not abstractions of countless texts, but the living relationality of Christ, enacted now in community, is that to which the sacraments call us. The proclamation is made in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ as we participate in the sacraments, and the beyond-words power of the word is conveyed in the

---

<sup>44</sup> Suchocki, 153.

wordless Word of bread, wine, water. God is communicated to us: God is for us, concretely, here, now.<sup>45</sup>

It is in the sacraments that Christians are grounded in the embodied word of Christ. Similar to the Samoan ava ceremony, the visitors and hosting village are embodied not only in their god Tagaloa but in each other in harmony, peace and love. Also, people of the community have established a relationship with the soil and the earth. It is the sense of oneness with Tagaloa and the creation, which includes people, earth and plants, and the Divine. The elements of the cosmos and the universe have created a relationship, the embodiment of oneness.

#### Theological Significance of the Samoan Myths-Creation Story

The biblical account of the creation story as mentioned in the book of Genesis was of God's spoken words. And the creation of the cosmos as well as the earth and its creatures came into being. But when it was the moment for the creation of the first human being, it seems as if God summoned his heavenly court for a collective decision, as it states in Genesis 1:26, "Then God said, Let us make humankind in our own image, according to our likeness;..."<sup>46</sup> Perhaps, it is the importance of the first human being that God calls forth his heavenly family for a collaboration and a corporate effort. Likewise, regarding the alu'alutoto /embryo myth the human being is taken as part of the natural developmental process, which begins with the intermarriage of different materials and compounds of earth. Before Tagaloa instructed the miti/black bird to breathe into the nostrils of the embryo, Tagaloa already consulted with his heavenly family for a

---

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 153.

<sup>46</sup> Genesis 1:16 (NRSV).

collective and communal decision about the life of the first human being. It is a decision that Tagaloa needs to summon his heavenly court for a thorough corporate verdict. This type of a collective decision, reveals how very sensitive and profound the creation of the first human being was to god Tagaloa. Man has a close relationship with nature as well as nature is part of man according to the Samoan creation story.

Another Samoan creation story describes how Tagaloa created the first two human beings, Fatu (male) and Elele (female), from the matter that formed or took shape under his feet. In the process of creating the two human beings according to anthropologist Freeman,

Tagaloa endowed them with soul (agaga), affections (loto), wills (finagalo) and the power of thought (masalo; literally doubt), which, then mingled together, gave them intelligence (atamai). This recognition of finagalo, the capacity for alternative action, and of masalo, the capacity to assess experience critically, as vital components of human intelligence, is an indication of the great sophistication of theological speculation in pagan Samoa.<sup>47</sup>

When the work was completed by the creator Tagaloa, he retired to the tenth heaven, (Lagi-tuasefulu). This tenth “heaven” according to the Samoan tradition, is above the heavens of all the other deities that Tagaloa created, and he reigned as the most superior king of heaven and earth, only revealed when there is work to be done in accordance with his will. In the Samoan traditions, Tagaloa is always looking after and has interest in the daily life of the Samoan people. Tagaloa intervenes when he hears the pain and cries of his people. In process thought, God shares the experiences of every creature, and responds to that creature in a way appropriate to it. In other words, God responds to the world when love is violated

---

<sup>47</sup> Freeman, 181.

In this creation story, Samoans believe that their god Tagaloa relates to his people in every way, regardless of what the situation is. Tagaloa is the supreme and superior god over the Pacific and the universe. He protects and provides for his people. Tagaloa responds when the welfare of his people is offended and interrupted. Likewise in the process concept, God responds and acts when love is disturbed and violated. For Mesle, “To love is to feel all the passions of joy, sorrow, grief, fear, hope, and triumph that bind us to each other, that make life so dynamic and changeable.”<sup>48</sup> God is affected when human beings’ love and welfare are disturbed and oppressed.

Again in reference to the *alu’alutoto* myth, the human being is seen as an outcome of the intertwining of various compounds of earth. He is the handiwork of nature. Likewise, in process thought God is fully responsive to the world. God shares the experience of every creature and responds to every creature in every way necessary. Because God responds to every creature’s experience, according to process thought human beings are influenced by the touch of God. Every occasion in the world begins with the influence of God. The myth reveals that the human being does not have life or the divine spark by himself; Tagaloa did not command the *miti*/black bird to breathe into the nostrils of the embryo, but rather to suck out the life that is possibly already there in the human being. The implication that can be made here is that life was already present in the human being and in nature. All it needs is for God to harmonize that life.

However, life is subordinate to the power of the deities. This gives the impression that the human being is not independent, not self-reliant and self-sufficient.

---

<sup>48</sup> Mesle, 29.



The human being depends upon both nature and gods to fulfill human destiny and full humanhood. In process understanding, all creatures in the world in every moment experience God. We experience God in the decisions we make and the possibilities of those decisions. For Mesle,

God enters into the experience of every creature in every moment in the finite history of the universe,... Each creative moment is born in God's creative love. Without the divine spark the world could not become.<sup>49</sup>

In other words, God feels the world, not superficially but as a reality. God feels and experiences every creature's movement. Not only does God feel and experience the world's movement but God will assist human beings to fulfill the best possibility given. Suchocki contends, "But God not only feels the man in his own self's constitution. God feels him in the light of what could have been possible had the man actualized the initial aim given him by God."<sup>50</sup> God is always and constantly watching man. One of the motifs in biblical theology is that God is seeking after the human being.

The alu'alutoto myth gives the implication that god empowers the human being with his divine power; without the supreme deity's spirit in the human being, he is lifeless, drifting and floating empty upon the sea of confusion, until he is saved by God, nurturing him until he has gained his full humanity. Islander culture substitutes the "sea of confusion" for the desert wilderness that must be overcome in the Old Testament with (Moses and Hebrews) and the New Testament, (with Jesus' ordeal in the wilderness). Likewise in process understanding, God is always seeking after the human being,

---

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 59.

<sup>50</sup> Suchocki, 108.

because God is a relational God and a communal Being, and is always present. To process, God is touched by every occasion. When the world is in a chaotic and corrupted stage, God will always find a way to harmonize with the corruption so that human beings can have enjoyment with God and with others. Cobb agrees that

Enjoyment is God's primary concern even with those beings who are capable of developing moral attitudes. But this is not in conflict with an emphasis on morality. God wants us to enjoy, true. But he wants us all to enjoy...he wants us to enjoy in ways that do not unnecessarily inhibit enjoyment on the part of others.<sup>51</sup>

In other words, God wants our enjoyment to be an enjoyment in such a way that will increase the enjoyment of others. But this enjoyment has to be moral in order that we do not abuse other's enjoyment to gain our enjoyment. For Tagaloa to bring the alu'alutoto to his heavenly family for nursing, until the fullness of time has grounded in the human being the achievement of humanhood, is a fundamental sign of enjoyment of fellowship with his human being. But it is also simply a sign of enjoyment and love that responds in an act of enjoyment. And since God is a relational God according to process understanding; then it is God's intention to have fellowship with his creation. And fellowship with God generates true enjoyment. Cobb agrees with this statement and indicates that,

process theology sees God's fundamental aim to be the promotion of the creatures' own enjoyment. Good's creative influence upon them is loving, because it aims at promoting that which the creatures experience as intrinsically good.<sup>52</sup>

God's creative love is offered to all of his creation, because all are actualities,

---

<sup>51</sup> Cobb, 56.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 56.

experiences, and have some levels of enjoyment. So God's love is always responsive and creative for the world. God is always responding to the actual situations of the world, calling people toward enjoyment and goodness in the world. God's love is always creative because there are many different ways in which God can create enjoyment and good in the world. This is possible because people have different ways of perceiving God, because people and community have different cultural backgrounds and experiences. And God is responding to different people and different backgrounds by working with people in their different cultures and settings.

#### Practical Guides to How Samoan Relational Motifs Support Various Church Ministries

##### Ava and Eucharist

The role of the sacraments in the church is to unify and enhance the diversity in unity of the life of the church, as well as the uniformity of the earthly life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. There are many interpretations of Jesus Christ, but only one person who is Jesus Christ. But Jesus Christ has many interpretations and incarnations in the realities of many cultures, in many times, and many encounters. Each religion has its own interpretation and they do the job in their own way. I will use the metaphor of a Samoan fale (house), thirty feet in diameter, a hundred feet in circumference, and raised from the ground about four or five feet by a number of posts, with a space of four feet between each, all around. The spaces between these posts are called open doors or windows. The doors, because of the unity of their source which is the fale, are creative of a new unity in their togetherness in diversity in the many entrances of the fale. The sacraments are like Christ, who is one, and they are interpreted as the multiple doors of

the encounter with Christ. And for this Samoan setting, the ava ceremony has a relation to the process understanding of the Eucharist.

In the ava ceremony, Samoans gather together to celebrate the fullness of life for that moment with friends and visiting parties coming to their village. It is a celebration of thanksgiving, not only to god Tagaloa for his guidance and protection, but also, a proclamation of the work that Tagaloa has accomplished in the earth. After the high chief's ava has been served, the chief will first proclaim that this cup is for the god Tagaloa in thanks for bringing the parties together in harmony and love; then the chief pours a small amount of ava on the ground. The importance of this action is the revelation and proclamation of Tagaloa's love and protection that make this event possible. In process thought the Eucharist is the proclamation of unity, creating a community or a fellowship for those who celebrate Christ. The Eucharist is essential to the life of the church. It is the proclamation of the word and a celebration of the work of God. It is a thanksgiving to the Father for what he has achieved in the world through creation, redemption and sanctification. Suchocki indicates that,

The proclamation is made in the reality of bread, wine, water. We repeat the words telling of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ as we participate in the wordless Word of bread, wine, water. God is communicated to us; God is for us, concretely, here, now.<sup>53</sup>

In our worship services, before the elements of the Eucharist has been served to the members, there is always a moment of singing by the congregation. It is a proclamation of unity and thanksgiving. Samoans love to sing and dance. And this element of entertainment has long been practiced in Samoa as well as in the South Pacific

---

<sup>53</sup> Suchocki, 153.

region long before missionaries arrived. This become in nowadays one of their annual competition events for the Flag Day celebration. Each village forms a dancing group of 300-400 dancers. This element of the Samoan culture has been integrated within the worship service during the Eucharist. Before the bread and wine are served, the congregation will sing hymns as a symbol of their proclamation and reflections upon the love of God. The Samoans as a community convey their thanksgiving in words of singing and praising. In their singing and praising they experience the incarnation of the love and the spirit of Jesus Christ. In process thought that same notion is conveyed by Suchocki when she says,

In the midst of our wordiness, there comes a living word, the Christ, in all the concreteness of embodiment and relationality. Yes, we interpret that word, too, and are invited to do so--but the sacraments, themselves interpreting that Word into our texts and textuality, for the Word is no abstraction- the Word can be touched, tasted, and it is concretely embodied word that finally frees and nourishes us.<sup>54</sup>

Although there are similarities within the Samoan *ava* ritual and the Eucharist, there are also differences. In the *ava* ceremony no children are allowed to participate during the ritual. It is reserved only to those who hold the *matai*/chief title. It is a ritual that belongs to the councils of chiefs. This is unlike the Christian process understanding, in which everyone has an opportunity to participate in the Eucharist. It is a sacrament for everyone. Every member of all ages has the sense of accountability, has the right to participate in the Christian ceremony. Suchocki indicates,

Through the faithfulness of the Church in proclamation, and the faith of the church embodied in that proclamation, one comes or is brought to the community

---

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 153.

for incorporation into that faith. Adults come through the faith, and receive baptism. The children of the community are brought through the faith of the church to be embraced by the church in baptism.<sup>55</sup>

Another difference I have witnessed: in the *ava* ceremony the council of chiefs must all drink from one cup with one usher to distribute the *ava* to all the ranking or high chiefs that are present in the *ava* ritual. It is customary and mandatory to accept and drink *ava* from one cup. It is a symbol of unity, the embodiment of one spirit of love and harmony. In the Christian process understanding, many glasses can be used for the distribution of the wine. But during our Maundy Thursday service every year, I integrate this Samoan disposition or practice by using one cup for our congregation and myself as the only usher to distribute the wine and the bread, to reenact the Last Supper of Jesus and his disciples.

#### Theological Implications of Tagaloa and the Process God

In the myth of Tagaloa-a-lagi as the creator of the first two human beings, as mentioned in the previous pages, Tagaloa crowned them with his divine attributes: soul, affection, will, doubt, and intelligence. The importance of the creation of human beings moved Tagaloa-a-lagi to collaborate with his heavenly court. Human beings are different from other earthly creatures because of the formation of life given to the human beings by Tagaloa-a-lagi, god of the skies. The myth puts the human beings in a special place outside the natural order of life. In process thought, God embraces the attributes of love and freedom. All creatures have the sense of love within them. Mesle indicates that,

---

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 154.

Being filled with love, we become more loving. And as we choose to love, we open ourselves further to let that love pour into our hearts, further empowering us to become still more loving... this love is the very foundation of freedom and love within all creatures. This gracious-unmerited-love is continually poured into all creation.<sup>56</sup>

In reference to the alu'alutoto myth, the human being is regarded as the result of the intertwining of the earth's compounds. The human being is the production of the natural resources and the long gradual process of nature. In process thought, the human being's God is fully responsive to the world. God provides the world with the divine spark. God shares the experience of every creature. Samoans believe that Tagaloa takes notice and has a vital interest in their actions. They believe that Tagaloa intervenes when the process of harmony among his people is violated. Freeman indicates in one of his writings that,

In one myth he is "keen-eyed Tagaloa," whose "all-seeing eyes" follow a guilty man wherever he goes. So, as Turner notes, when Pava fled to the earth below after desecrating the kava of the gods he still saw the "terrible eye" of the indignant Tagaloa looking down on him. When angered by those who had behaved improperly Tagaloa swiftly became a dreaded punishing force. When his son Le Fanoga negligently spoilt an oven of food, Tagaloa pelted him with burning yam, marking his body with reddish spots, like that of the owl in which Le Fanoga later became incarnate as a war god.<sup>57</sup>

Tagaloa is seen here as not only looking out for the interests of his people, but he will reprimand them when the harmony with others is violated. These attributes of Tagaloa are similar to that of the god of the Old Testament. Freeman supports the statement that,

Tagaloa, then, was an all-seeing, all-powerful creator god, remote yet ever present, peace loving yet ever ready to punish the disobedient and wayward, who bore a distinct resemblance to the supreme and demanding god of the

---

<sup>56</sup> Mesle, 39.

<sup>57</sup> Freeman, 182-83.

ancient Hebrews and of the strait-laced.<sup>58</sup>

The difference of attributes of Tagaloa and the traditional God in relation to the process God is that the love of God in process understanding is not controlling or coercive, but rather persuasive and empowering. In process thought God responds in love but is not violent. For Mesle, “To love is to be affected. To love is to enter into intimate relation with others. To love is to feel all passions of joy, sorrow, grief, fear, hope, and triumph that binds to each other, that make life so dynamic and changeable.”<sup>59</sup>

Another point to be noticed is that, when the god Jehovah apparently took root in Samoa and became superior to Tagaloa, that brought strict changes to the pagan religion of the Samoans. Freeman indicates that,

The pagan religion of the Samoans had been thick with prohibitions, and as Wilkes observed in 1839, wherever Christianity had taken root in Samoa the ten commandments rapidly became law, with any infringement of them being punished by immediate withdrawal of the privilege of attending worship. The observance of Sunday also became very strict; it became impossible to get a native to do anything whatsoever on that day, but perform his religious duties. These duties, which included morning and evening prayers on every day of the year, were attended to with a devotion rarely to be seen among civilized men.<sup>60</sup>

This has been witnessed when growing up in Samoa, and is still being exercised by Samoan Christians in their new homeland. Although there were strict interpretations of the gospel being brought by the missionaries, it has been a transformation to better the lives of the Samoan Christian communities. For example, in

---

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 183.

<sup>59</sup> Mesle, 29.

<sup>60</sup> Freeman, 184-85.



our main worship service every Sunday, almost ninety-nine percent of our church members attend our service. Sunday in the Samoan Christian community is a whole day event. This practice has influenced our other worship services as well as our prayer meetings on Saturday morning at 5:00 A.M. Samoans are very disciplined and religious people. And as a Samoan pastor, I have taken advantage of opportunities like these because it is no longer that easy to evangelize and bring believers to Christ. I believe this is a good integration of the Samoan traditions into the Samoan Christian community, because I have seen positive results and hear good feedback from members, as well as an increased the in church membership. It keeps their spiritual journey in life balanced and beneficial to them, as well as the enjoyment of knowing that they have a relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ.

In process understanding, God wants us to enjoy life in a way that we will encourage others to have enjoyment as well. Cobb supports the idea of enjoyment by saying, “The divine initial aim for our human experiences is such as to transform into immediate enjoyment the intention to contribute to future good.”<sup>61</sup> In other words, God’s aim is for our enjoyment to be an encouragement in a way that will enhance the satisfaction of others.

#### Ideal of the Samoan Extended Family

The Samoan extended family is similar to the church as God’s family. It is an actual occasion consisting of different units, which are individuals and groups. The Samoan family is the matrix for Samoan culture and spirituality. This is the place where

---

<sup>61</sup> Cobb and Griffin, 57.

love is nurtured, disciplined and protected. It is a place where identity and dignity are being protected and maintained. Therefore, the members serve the family with passion and commitment, dedication and pride. Their sense of pride and dedication has been transferred to their service to the work of God and the church, serving the Lord Jesus Christ. This sense of community orientation has been the driving force for integration in the Samoan community, for the beginning of new churches in the United States. There is now a paradigm shift with the structure of the matai system and authority. The village concept no longer exists in their new homeland, but the matai, as I have stated in the previous chapter exercised his power and authority as the matai/chief in the establishing of a new church. Because of the large size of the of a Samoan household, a good size for a newly established church will not be a problem.

The theological implication, of the role of the Samoan extended family now is that it becomes a center for group salvation within the church. This has become a mission to enhance the growth of our choir ministry, women's association, youth fellowship and Sunday school programs. Most of the matais have now become deacons, and they make it their responsibility to make sure that their families are attending various ministries and services in the church.

On third Sunday in the month of July every year our church promotes the concept of a Samoan family service, in which every matai who is a deacon of our church will bring every member of his extended family to our worship service. Regardless of what denomination or different church family members belongs to they will make an effort to come and show respect to their matai. They will all wear the Samoan or Polynesian attire.

The extended family will all sit together with their matai.. There will be no organized choir, but everyone will sing acapella. The purpose of all this type of ministry is to integrate the reality of the Samoan communal concept into the church environment, as well as using this concept to promote evangelism, and outreach for the church, while also maintaining their heritage and identity. Also, this is an attempt to maintain their responsibilities as a good matai, as if they were in their villages in Samoa. And the faithful members of the extended family perform their duties as tautua/servant to their matais. Also, they have good performance in service to their Lord, Jesus Christ. The Samoans find it an easy transition to understand the authority of Christ above the church because of their knowledge of the matai's authority over the Samoan extended family. The relationship of the Samoans to their matai, which is honor and respect, is easily transferred to the pastor and parishioner relationship in which the pastor is regarded with high respect in the Samoan church and community. This has been a very humble experience to me as well as other Samoan pastors, because of the unworthiness to deserve such high respect from the people or the community. As I have mentioned the impact of the matai authority has been used with some of the ministries of the church being mentioned.

I have alluded in the previous chapter to the preaching ministry as being another effective tool for ministry in the Samoan church. Because the power of the Samoan culture is in the art of oratory, and in authority, I believe preaching will be another vantage point in doing ministry. High talking chiefs in the Samoan culture, in making a formal speech, often compete to speak on behalf of the village. Freeman indicates that,

Competition in the making of orations is especially marked among talking chiefs, the whole pattern of oratory, as Holmes has noted, being based upon competition in order to win prestige both for the orator himself and for the village or family he presents. Engaging in this activity is termed *fa'atau*, literally which means to provoke contention, and such competition is the standard practice among talking chiefs at a *fono*/council or any other important social occasion at which orations are made.<sup>62</sup>

These types of orations or speeches take a special talking chief or orator with a special gift. The talking chief has to be a knowledgeable and wise regarding the Samoan culture. An oration is the competition of the mind and the heart, and it needs a gifted *matai* to accept this calling. After all, being a *matai* is a vocation as well as a duty. This is the impression of the *matai* when the title has been bestowed. Our church has two lay preachers that hold *matai* titles. They integrated in their preaching the skills and knowledge, passion and wisdom, and the competitive spirit that they have already preoccupied as being a *matai*. And with that conviction in the mind of any Samoan pastor or lay preacher, then they will be able to preach and teach the Gospel of Jesus Christ with the knowledge that it is not him/her who holds the authority. But it is God who has the authority over the pastors as well as the lay preachers. And with that knowledge the pastor will always preach with conviction, a humble heart, and great discernment.

The *matai* can be busy with village functions, but the mother maintains harmony and peace within the family. The mother in the extended family can be described as the spirit. She provides comfort and care as well as love and protection for the whole family. The mother's roles can be compared to the roles of the Spirit.

---

<sup>62</sup> Freeman, 149.

In the traditional Samoan setting as mentioned in the funeral occasions section, women are given the responsibility of singing, and their songs themselves possess inner strength that will give healing power. There will be intense prayers to soothe broken hearts. In the women's ministry, when there is a funeral in our church, women are always responsible for singing. In the women's singing of healing songs, they are able to invoke the Holy Spirit by using their hymns and songs to receive the Spirit. This type of women's ministry has also been integrated in our sub-district level. And it has been a rewarding ministry not only for the bereaved family but an opportunity for evangelism.

In the Samoan culture, dancing is always an element that women will be given a chance to exhibit or express their talents. In the Samoan setting, the dance called the *taualuga* the last or the most important dance of any event, is performed by village *taupou* or village young women. The women's association of our church in the month of November every year holds our last big fundraising, which is sponsored by the women of our church. This fundraising or entertainment is known as a family night, in which every mother of the church provides a *taupou* to dance for her family. In the process of the *taupou's* dancing, friends and relatives support the dance by donating money to the *taupou*. This kind of proceeds in the women's ministry for the church has tremendously benefited our church for years. However, in reality, the fact that Samoan women are only good for doing this dance in the context of the *taualuga* is unfortunate. But integrating this ritual in the church setting will transform the ability of the women to communicate the gifts of the Holy Spirit and could be recognized and affirmed at all levels of the church and community.

The Samoan extended family as an agent for the salvation of the community demands a good spiritual leader. This leader needs good qualities, as I mentioned in previous pages. In other words, an ideal matai should have Christian principles, and be a leader who regards himself as a true servant of God. However, one of the downfalls that sometimes influences the role of the matai, is being preoccupied with power and fame. Oftentimes, the matai's power can be abusive and self-centered. But a matai who leads and rules his extended family in line with Christians principles, with the knowledge that his power is subservient and succumbs to the authority of God is a true Christian leader. The matai should have the knowledge that the authority of God is not controlling nor forceful, but has a love like that of a father who is persuasive and empowering, with the intention to lure the heart of the rebellious son to the circle of love as recorded in the parable of the prodigal son.

For John Cob, “the only power capable of any worthwhile result is the power of persuasion.”<sup>63</sup> In other word, God calls us to greater love, life and freedom. God's uses the power of persuasion to accomplish and fulfill his purpose in the world.

---

<sup>63</sup> John B. Cobb, Jr., God and the World (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1969), 90.

## Chapter 5

### Summary and Conclusion

#### Summary

The fundamental focus and purpose of this project as previously stated, is an attempt to recover and apply the Samoan traditions and values through employment of process theology and understanding, in order to construct a relational theology of the Fa'a-Samoa (the Samoan way of life). I truly believe that in order to do effective ministry in Samoa as well as in America, New Zealand, Australia, and other parts of the world, it is important to shape and develop a theology that is relevant and has a meaning for the people. It is important for the church in Samoa and America to realize the dynamic nature of the culture and the Gospel. The church needs to study and understand the Samoan culture in order to have a broader appreciation of it. This will allow the Church to integrate the Gospel into the life of the people and communicate it to them in their own context, using their own traditions and values. The Church, in the light of the Gospel with its transforming power, must stand firm as a means to bring about positive changes to the negative elements and attitudes that are very much alive within the Church of God and its communities.

Truly, religion and culture have an inseparable relationship. These two entities are close to each other. Hence, the Christian faith should not and cannot be apart from a culture. A proposal, I believe, should be described here for the implementation of the integration of the Gospel into the culture, and the transformation of the culture. These should be the basic concepts of a relational theology of the Fa'a-Samoa. According to

Paul Tillich,

Religion as ultimate concern is the meaning-giving of culture, and culture is the totality of forms in which the basic concern of religion expresses itself. In abbreviation: religion is the substance of culture, culture is the form of religion.... Every religious act, not only in organized religion, but also in the most intimate movement of the soul, is culturally formed.<sup>1</sup>

Absolutely every theology must be contextual. Because no theology is developed out of a space or a vacuum. It is through participation and involvement in one's own setting, using the language and cultural values available to transmit and interpret religious concepts of the community of faith.

A study of relational concepts of the Samoan traditions and values is vital for a relational theology of the Samoan culture. This calls for a critical analysis of relational concepts of the Samoan traditions and values. Religious practices, special and ceremonial occasions, extended family and individual members need to be taken under seriously investigated. For this, we discover these aspects as resources to develop a relational theology of Fa'a-Samoa. Also, this can help us better appreciate the Christian faith. At the same level of appreciation, we will become aware of the adverse elements of the culture that need to be corrected and transformed, and therefore, present the culture with a more positive and authentic message for the Gospel of Jesus of Christ.

Based on a scrutiny of the Samoan cultural traditions and values, a relational theology can be developed. This will be of service as a backbone and a basis for the Samoan ministry in Samoa as well as in their new home abroad. A relational theology of the Fa'a-Samoa will bring a complete or holistic perspective for Samoan Christians, as

---

<sup>1</sup> Paul Tillich, Theology of Culture (New York: Oxford University Press, 1959), 42.



well as an introduction to other cultural ethnicities, through contextualization, integration, and transformation. This will not only present the Gospel in a way that is closer to Samoan Christians and their quest for God, but it will maintain the validity of some of the relational and communal concepts of the Samoan culture.

### Conclusion

In actuality, many different theologies have been written out from many cultural backgrounds and settings. Theologies such as liberation theology in Latin America, Africa, and black theology in America; third world theology and minjung theology, were all efforts to communicate their understanding of the Divine and integrate the Christian faith through their cultural background of a particular community of faith. Certainly, theology is usually defined, shaped and expressed through the Western culture and forms, and therefore is mostly irrelevant to the Pacific and the Samoan people. Most of the time western theology creates a gap between the sacred and human, heaven and earth. Truly, western theology is one among many different ways to understand and Communicate with God. There is one God, and there is one Jesus Christ, and one faith but there is more than one way to communicate the truth. According to John Hick,

And so we come back to our original question, Why should religious faith take a number of such different forms? Because, I would suggest religious faith is not an isolated aspect of our lives but is closely bound up with human culture and human history, which are in turn bound up with basic geographical, climate; and economic circumstances.<sup>2</sup>

Jesus of Nazareth, in his life as a carpenter, expressed his concepts of God and truth based on the issues and categories of his time and place. The words and sayings of

---

<sup>2</sup> John Hick, God Has Many Names (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1982), 51.

Jesus somehow became incarnated in the life of the Palestinian community. It was Jesus who became flesh and eventually grew to be accepted by the people, because of the authenticity of his teaching for the daily lives of the people. Jesus became the father figure of the people's theology. Jesus' theology was not developed out of a vacuum. It was neither abstract nor written in any set of system, but it was pertinent and relevant to the life of the community. It was totally different from the teaching of the Scribes, the Pharisees, and the Sadducees. Jesus as the Word of God became flesh and lived among the Jews, a certain community of people. He used the same language, the cultural values, traditions, and philosophy, as a means of communication to express his theological perspective of life.

It is applicable to allow the farmers, the peasants, the outcasts to express their faith and understanding about their God in their own language. This is a sign of maturity and independence. A man is mature when he can think and do for himself. A country is independent when it can meet the needs and the welfare of its people. Likewise, the Samoan church can show maturity and independence in this time and age when it can develop and create a Samoan theology. Spiritual and economic dependence is a sign of immaturity.

It is not an easy task to develop a Samoan relational theology. It is a lot of work and it is dangerous, because a Samoan theology could be seen as underqualified and not capable when compared to foreign theologies. Moreover, for a long time, the Samoan church has been very comfortable and familiar with the western theologies and ideologies, as well as western products and imports. Consequently, I believe that the

Samoan church has lost its awareness of the problem and cannot be conscious of its dependency. This madness has been witnessed, and long existed in the Samoan church, and is creating a great gap between the second, third, and fourth generations of Samoans in America. The Samoan young couples and the youth have negative attitudes and reactions toward their culture. This problem is not limited only to the United States, but it influences our churches in the islands due to the mass migration back and forth of the Samoan immigrants as well as tourists. Another problem is, the advanced technological invasion of the islands, by the coming of age of technology in American Samoa as well as in Samoa, formerly called Western Samoa. The present generations of Samoans are moving more toward rejecting our traditional values and norms. Some of their misbehaviors and negative attitudes are seen and evident in their frustrated statements such as:

The only reason while I am going and contribute to the church, as well as contribute to our extended family donations and traditional custom, is because my parents tell me that it is an obligation to obtain. But when they are gone, I will not go back to church, or donate any more financial resources to the extended family.<sup>3</sup>

This negative attitude originated from a misunderstanding on the part of the younger Samoans, not knowing how to practice and use the culture. Also, there is an abuse of power within the extended family and within the church by the matai/chiefs and the older generation for their own gain prestige. This has led to the drifting away of the younger generation of Samoans from church and culture. They come away with a the conclusion that culture is a burden and make them a slave; it is offensive and revolting.

---

<sup>3</sup> This was from a Samoan youth meeting that our district held, in the areas of Los Angeles, Oxnard, Oceanside, and San Diego, where large numbers of Samoans are concentrated.

Although I have mentioned on the previous pages of this chapter that it is dangerous to develop a Samoan relational theology because of being underqualified if compared to foreign theologies, we should take risks. Life is about taking a risk; no risk, no growth. God took a very big risk, and a dangerous journey that adventure into a dangerous theology, the risk of the Word became flesh, there could have been the excitement of the Easter, empty tomb. A dangerous theology that is costly to God. Bonhoeffer agreed, “it is costly because it cost God the life of his son,”<sup>4</sup> It is costly and risky theology because it calls us to follow Jesus. Jesus is the incarnate word of God. The word became flesh. It is dangerous because it costs an individual his life.

In developing a relational theology of the Fa’a-Samoa, we use the Samoan traditions and values that are relational and communal in their concepts as previously mentioned in chapter 2. These resources and values are the building materials for a Fa’a-Samoan relational theology. Of course, with our simple traditions and values we cannot build a great and exciting theology. Moreover, a relational theology for the Samoans at the beginning is not and should not be comparable with western or other theologies. Needless to say, the Pacific region has not created or developed a Pacific theology for the Pacific people. However, the important point is that a relational theology of the Fa’a-Samoa is developed by the Samoan wisdom with the Samoan cultural resources.

Samoans, like other Pacific people, are always proud of their culture. American Samoa for one hundred seven years has been a territory and under the protection of the

---

<sup>4</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer. The Cost of Discipleship trans. R. H. Fuller, rev. and unabridged ed. (London: SCM Press, 1959), 37.

United States, but never has lost sight of the importance of their culture. In reality, when a stronger nation and culture clashes with a so-called “inferior” culture and its people, the balance of the scale tends to swing to the stronger side. And that is not the case with the islands of American Samoa and its people. Although there are some great changes and influences from the outside world, as I have mentioned in the previous chapter, the essence of some of the traditions and values are still intact. Samoans are happy with their culture. And for that it is important and it is time to make the Gospel incarnate and integrated in the culture, and then with the transforming power, the Gospel will begin a creative transformation, the Gospel will transform the negative aspects of the culture. In such a way, the Gospel will then become hopeful and Good News for the people. In this way the extended family with its relational and communal concept becomes trustworthy in developing the needs of the individuals within the family.

The extended family concept will not limit its effectiveness within the family boundary, but will cause a paradigm shift of a village concept into the church. The Samoans can integrate that concept into their churches in the United States and other parts of the world. The deacons now, will have the responsibilities and authorities of the matai to care and provide for his immediate and extended families needs, it could be by taking his families to church, or provide financial support, or moral support for the members of the family. Although the forms and the environment changed but the essence and the importance of the matai still connected with his family members. This idea will be beneficial to the Samoan community when social problems arise, because they will have the strength of numbers from churches; and that will minimize

problems as the Samoan community advances in the social mobility of American life.

Today in Samoa and in all the Samoan communities in the United States as well as New Zealand and other parts of the world, a Calvinistic concept of God is dominant. I believe before Christianity landed its missionaries on the shores of the Samoan islands, the understanding of God that the Samoans exercised was relational. This is proven and revealed in their understanding of entrusting everything to the will of God. God is always present in their midst and God reveals his initial aim to human beings. This concept is seen through the Samoan traditions. When a person dies, no matter how that person dies, or death occurs, according to the Samoan thinking it is the will of God. It is also revealed in their blessings, such as the bounty of the land with various fruits, and the sea with various blessing. Samoans believe in a relational God that is in all events, which is extremely close to belief in the process-relational God of process theology. In anything that happens, there is good and there is bad. And God transforms the negative situation with creative hope and a promising future out of that unfortunate event. God is both immanent and transcendent. God does not lose his immanence and transcendence when attached to the world. God transcends the world. God is more than static or absolute.

God is a cooperative unity. For Cully, “God is in unity with humanity as in process theology’s understanding of that God-human relationship acts as a primary model for relationship in general.”<sup>5</sup> In the Samoan culture almost everything has to do with the Samoan understanding of God. Samoans contemplate the importance of their beliefs and

---

<sup>5</sup> Iris and Kendig Brudaker Cully, *Process and Relationship: Issues in Theology, Philosophy, and Religious Education* (Birmingham: Religious Education Press, 1987), 57.

practices that are found in the idea that God exists with everything and is involved in everything.

Process theology has helped me to recapture and restore the sacredness of the Samoan traditions. In my own opinion, Samoans would have a better appreciation of the Gospel if they could see it through their own cultural heritage. And at the same time, they would have a better understanding of their own culture and be proud to affirm it for the Glory of God, and in return this would help them better serve other people. Perhaps in this way, the Samoan church and community can make an express contribution toward the pluralistic culture of the world to which they belong. I truly believe that it is time to integrate process thought in relation to the Samoan traditions and values in our church organizations, such as Sunday schools, Youth fellowships, deacons meeting, women fellowships, prayer meetings and many more.

In the United States, the family concept has been destroyed or broken down. Communities in the United States are desperately trying to find their identity and values in their families. It was once said that the family concept would withstand the change of the times, but now it is a thing of the past. Local, state and federal governments present some drastic statistics that the minors and young children are suffering the most from the breakdown of the American family. These breakdowns are not only affecting the Samoan community but the Asian-American communities as well.

The Samoan Church must attempt to reach into the Samoan families with a theological approach. The Samoan church must begin to function as a village, by reaching out to every family member. This is the framework of the Samoan traditions

and values. This is the backbone for survival of a Samoan family in America. The Samoan church has to relate and integrate the cultural concepts into the church's theological realm, as discussed in the beginning of chapter 4. The Samoan Church should constantly discover ways and ideas within the Samoan culture that will bring hope and peace to Samoan Christians. This will lead to order, harmony and enjoyment of the spirit. For God too the future is somewhat open. In an unfinished and dynamic world, God's spirit is always at work.



## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Afoa, Ioane Asalele. Divorce Counseling with Samoan Couples. D.Min. project, Claremont School of Theology, 1980. Ann Arbor, MI: UMI, 1980. 80-18693
- Bonhoeffer, Dietrich. The Cost of Discipleship. Trans. R. H. Fuller. Rev. and unabridged ed. London: SCM Press, 1959.
- Bousseau, Susan J., and Ben Toomalatai. Fa'a Samoa: Yesterday and Today, A Resource Guide. [Downey, CA]: Los Angeles County Office of Education; Sacramento, CA: Office of Criminal Justice Planning, 1993
- Cobb, John B., Jr. God and the World. Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1969.
- Cobb, John B., and David Ray Griffin. Process Theology: An Introductory Exposition. Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1976.
- Cully, Iris, and Kendig Brudaker. Process and Relationship: Issues in Theology, Philosophy, and Religious Education. Birmingham: Religious Education Press, 1987.
- Daly, Herman E., and John Cobb. For the Common Good: Redirecting the Economy Toward Community, the Environment, and a Sustainable Future. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Boston: Beacon Press, 1994.
- Daunivucu, Gabriele, presenter. "Spiritual Formation in the Pacific." Prepared by the Faculty of the Pacific Regional Seminary. In Towards a Relevant Pacific Theology: The Role of the Churches and Theological Education: A Report of a Theological Consultation Held in Bergengren House, Suva, Fiji, 8-12 July 1985. Suva, Fiji: Lotu Pasifika Productions in association with Pacific Theological College and the Pacific Conference of Churches, 1986.
- Diehl, David. W. "Process Theology." In Evangelical Dictionary of Theology. ed. Walter A. Elwell, Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1984.
- Freeman, Derek. Margaret Mead and Samoa: The Making and Unmaking of an Anthropological Myth. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983.
- Garrett, John. To Live among the Stars: Christian Origins in Oceania. Geneva; Suva, Fiji: World Council of Churches, in association with the Institute of Pacific Studies, University of the South Pacific, 1985.
- Geertz, Clifford. The Interpretation of Cultures. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House. 1987

- Gutierrez, Gustavo. A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics, and Salvation. Trans. and ed. Sister Caridad Inda and John Eagleson. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1973.
- Henry, Brother Fred. History of Samoa. Reprint. Apia, [Western Samoa]: Commercial Printers, 1992.
- Hick, John. God Has Many Names. Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1982.
- Holmes, Lowell D. Quest for the Real Samoa: The Mead/Freeman Controversy and Beyond. South Hadley, MA: Bergin and Garvey Publishers, 1987.
- \_\_\_\_\_. Samoa Village: Case Studies in Cultural Anthropology. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc. 1925.
- Iofi, Fa'afouina. Samoa Cultural Values and Christian Thought: An Attempt to Relate Traditional Values to Christian Understanding. D.Min. project, Claremont School of Theology, Ann Arbor, MI: UMI, 1980. 80-18692.
- Kuhn, Harold B. "Dualism." In Evangelical Dictionary of Theology. ed. Walter Elwell, Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1984.
- Lee, Jung Young. The Trinity in Asian Perspective. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996.
- Mead, Margaret. From the South Seas: Studies of Adolescence and Sex in Primitive Societies. New York: William Morrow and Co., 1939.
- Meleisea, Malama, and Penelope Schoeffel Meleisea. Lagaga: A Short History of Western Samoa. Suva, Fiji: University of the South Pacific, 1987.
- Mellert, Robert B. What is Process Theology? An Introduction to the Philosophy of Alfred North Whitehead, and How It Is Applied to Christian Thought. New York: Paulist Press, 1975.
- Mesle, C. Robert. Process Theology: A Basic Introduction. St. Louis: Chalice Press, 1993.
- Moore, Mary Elizabeth. Teaching from the Heart: Theology and Educational Method. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991.
- Murray, Leslie A. An Introduction to the Process-Understanding of Science, Society, and the Self: A Philosophy for the Modern Man. Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 1988.

- Oliver, Douglas L. Native Cultures of the Pacific Islands. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1989.
- Sala, Ulisese. A Theology of Samoan Christian Immigrants in the United States. D.Min. project, Claremont School of Theology, Ann Arbor, MI: UMI, 1980. 80-18702.
- Schultz, [Erich], comp. and trans. Samoan Proverbial Expressions: Alagaupu Fa'a-Samoa. Auckland, NZ: Polynesia Press, 1989.
- Song, C. S. Third Eye-Theology: Subtitled. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1986.
- Suchocki, Marjorie Hewitt. God, Christ, Church: A Practical Guide to Process Theology. New York: Crossroad Publishing, 1982.
- Tillich, Paul. Theology of Culture. New York: Oxford University Press, 1959.
- Whistler, W. Arthur. Samoan Herbal Medicine: 'O La'au ma Vai Fofo o Samoa. Honolulu: Isle Botanica, 1996.
- Williams, Daniel Day. Essays in Process Theology. Chicago: Illinois Exploration Press, 1985.